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ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT OR ACCESS TO EMPLOYERS:

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF EMPLOYERS' ATTITUDES
AND PRACTICES IN HIRING NEWCOMER JOB SEEKERS

by

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A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In the Program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2006

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT OR ACCESS TO EMPLOYERS:

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF EMPLOYERS' ATTITUDES
AND PRACTICES IN HIRING NEWCOMER JOB SEEKERS

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Abstract

This paper provides a detailed description of employers' attitudes and practices in hiring newcomer job seekers in an attempt to examine the access to employment issue through the lens of employers. It applies social inclusion theory and expands the existing conceptualization in order to answer four key questions: Who are these employers? Who do these employers hire and why? What are current recruiting practices? And how do such practices disadvantage newcomer job seekers, deliberately or inadvertently? Some key findings in this paper include: the disconnect between immigration and skill shortages in the perception of employers leads to their maintaining the status quo in hiring practices; employers' preferred hiring strategies and technologies are constructed on the existing social networks and therefore largely exclude newcomer job seekers; and employers interpret personal attributes based on mainstream social and corporate cultural norms and it disproportionately disadvantages newcomer job seekers.

Key words: employers; newcomer job seekers; employment; hiring attitudes; hiring practices

Key terms: access to employment; social inclusion; conceptual gap; deficit model; Early Silicon Age; hidden job market; cloning effect; societal culture; corporate or organizational culture; labour market reciprocity systems

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Myer Siemiatycki and all the other faculty members who have shared their knowledge and experience with me and guided me through my research. I am particularly indebted to Grace-Edward Galabuzi, my supervisor, for his dedication and all the encouraging words that have made my research project such an enjoyable learning experience. My appreciation also goes to John Shields, who happily spoke with me about my research interests and agreed to serve as my second reader without hesitation.

I am grateful to Elias Chu, our program coordinator, who has always provided generous support and help on any issues related to my research project.

My classmates have been a great source of my technical and emotional support. And I have truly enjoyed every moment of my discussions with them, during meeting sessions and on the phone.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my gratitude to Béla, Jonathan and Jeremy, who have been my best friends and support during my program and research period.

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Introduction: Setting the Stage

In the tide of globalization throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Canadian economy underwent a transformation from a traditional industrial economy to a post-industrial economy, a new knowledge-based economy represented by service and information technology (IT) industries. The emergence of this knowledge economy was perhaps the most important dimension of institutional change affecting newly arriving immigrants, including the dramatic expansion of education and the increased importance of education in the labour market (Reitz 2000, p. 580). Such evolution in global economy has prompted corresponding changes in Canada's immigration policy, which has shifted its primary target to people with high human capital. This is clearly reflected in the current point system introduced in 2002, in which the highest points are allocated to Education (25 points), Language (24 points), and Experience (21 points). The rationale behind this is that the more education and transferable skills people have, the more contribution they will be able to make to the host economy because well-educated immigrants tend to adapt and adjust to the labour market more quickly and require less public money for re-education and training. Such policy in particular is given a prominent position in that today 70 percent of the net new entrants to the labour force are immigrants. In fact, in Ontario, which each year receives the majority of Canada's new immigrants, virtually all growth in the labour force during the 1990s (97 percent) resulted from new immigrants (Lochhead 2003: p. 1). And by 2011, when the baby boomers are beginning to enter the retiring age in large numbers, immigrants will account for 100 percent of Canada's labour force growth.

Such education-focussed immigration policy has consequently brought in people from a wide range of non-traditional source countries. The common characteristics of these people are high

educational attainment and strong work experience. This feature is well documented in several articles. Portsmouth (2003) records one-third of recent immigrants hold a post-secondary degree (versus 18 percent of those born in Canada) and fully 60 percent of recent arrivals are "skilled" workers (p. 4). By excluding new immigrants under the age of 15, we are able to obtain more convincing figures that in 2004, 46 percent of new immigrants aged 15 and over held a university degree, and an additional 16 percent held a non-university diploma or trade certificate (CIC 2005). A comparison on educational profile in 2001 shows 60 percent of new immigrants held some post-secondary education (CIC 2002) compared to 43 percent of Canadian-born adults and 22.2 percent of the Canadian average for the same year (Lamontagne 2003: p. 1). Lochhead (2003) found that new immigrants in 2001 with a bachelor's degree actually exceeds the total number of undergraduate degrees granted in 1998 by Ontario's 29 universities – 66,013 versus 53,664 (p. 3). What's more, a higher proportion of newcomers than native born Canadians are educated and skilled in areas such as computer science, engineering and natural science occupations – all occupations critical for today's leading businesses (The Public Policy Forum 2004: p. 55).

However, the influx of highly educated professionals and tradespeople stands in stark contrast to the fact that recent immigrants are worse off than earlier immigrant cohorts when we most need the best and the brightest. Teelucksingh and Galabuzi (2005) demonstrate the declining labour force participation rates for recent immigrants in the twenty-year span from 75.7 percent in 1981, to 68.6 percent in 1991, and to the latest 65.8 percent in 2001 (p. 14). Walsh (2004) recorded that 47 percent of employed immigrants worked in jobs unrelated to their fields; 60 percent of foreign-educated professionals took jobs not related to their training when they first came to Canada, and many held the same job three years later; and less than 25 percent of those

who were actually employed were working in the field for which they had been educated (p. 1). A similar study by Statistics Canada compared occupations of immigrants before and after arrival in Canada and found that 60 percent of new immigrants did not find employment in the same occupational fields they had prior to arriving in Canada. 52 percent of these people were looking for another job. After six months in Canada, 24.9 percent of employed immigrant men and 37.3 percent of employed immigrant women were working in sales and service occupations. Before arriving in Canada, only 10.2 percent of these men and 12.1 percent of these women were employed in such occupations. On the other hand, only about half of immigrants who were previously employed in natural and applied science occupations had these occupations after arrival in Canada (CLBC 2004: p. 22). As recent immigrants have not been able to translate their educational attainment and work experience into commensurate occupational status or income, such situation is often referred to as "from brain gain to brain waste". As a result, poverty rates for recent immigrants have risen substantially from 24.6 percent in 1981 to 35.8 percent in 2001 (Statistics Canada 2003). The decline of the immigrant home ownership advantage as well as the rising self-employment rates in recent immigrant populations further illustrate this precarious situation (RBC Financial Group 2005: p. 17).

One of the most disturbing findings is that the increasing poverty rates are evident for newcomers in all age groups, at all education levels, of all language backgrounds, and in all family types (Lochhead 2003). So what the rising poverty numbers tell us is that the transition is becoming more difficult for new arrivals. My research also shows that newcomers face a myriad of barriers in their initial settlement process, of which the most prominent ones are centred around gaining access to employment. This "transition penalty" clearly points to the initial lack of access to employment as the culprit, which consequently has a long lasting impact on immigrants' labour

market performance. According to newcomers, employment is the single most important aspect of settlement and their greatest need. And this need occurs usually within one year upon their arrival. Therefore, how fast and well newcomers can find gainful employment in their initial settlement stage dictates their labour market integration in the long run.

In fact, the labour market integration is a multi-dimensional issue involving multiple players including all levels of government, educational institutions, employers, unions, regulatory bodies, academic credential assessment services and immigrant settlement agencies, as well as skilled immigrants themselves and their associations. Copious studies have been conducted to address the barriers facing both newcomers and the host society. For instance, according to a longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada, 70 percent of new immigrants trying to enter the labour force identified at least one problem with the process. The top three barriers immigrants cited were lack of Canadian work experience, transferability of foreign qualifications and language barriers (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallett 2005: p. 24). In addition, all the signs of unemployment and underemployment seem to suggest some systematic problems that exist in the host society. Occupational barriers, including both formal and informal occupational barriers, are defined as entry requirements that seek to control access to employment in different occupations (Ahamad, Roberts, Sobkow, and Boothby 2003: p. 8). Licensing regulations that govern entry to occupations compose the main formal barrier to employment. Access to employment can also be affected by other aforementioned factors such as failing to recognize foreign credentials and work experience. These are often referred to as informal occupational barriers. Formal barriers are well documented and widely known to the public. But newcomer job seekers may only encounter informal barriers when they apply for a job. My research has discovered that the current public discourse seems to be predominantly centred around

newcomers' barriers to integrating into Canadian society as well as formal occupational barriers on the part of the host society. Informal barriers in the labour market, which are oftentimes hidden and further obscured by other more obvious factors, have been largely examined on an ad-hoc basis with a lack of guidance to systematic policy-making.

Since employers are the key stakeholder in the labour market hiring processes, they play a critical role in imposing informal occupational barriers to the initial access to employment on newcomer job seekers. Currently in Ontario, there are 34 regulated professions, 20 mandatory trades and 34 voluntary trades. As a matter of fact, regulated professions and trades, like doctors and engineering, only account for 15 percent of the job market. The other 85 percent is made up of unregulated professions and trades, the hiring in which is solely dependent on employers' criteria and judgment. And even for regulated professions, it is employers' decision whether or not they will accept foreign trained immigrant job seekers who have managed to acquire licenses to practice in their fields. For a great number of skilled immigrants, the only thing standing between them and a job is the employer. Therefore, I deem that there is no possibility of resolving access to employment issues without pinning down employers' attitudes and practices in hiring newcomer job seekers.

The employers' hiring attitudes and practices have been mostly reflected in literature involving immigrant job seekers. Very limited studies have been done from the perspective of employers to examine the nature of this issue. Such research gap is a result of two reasons. First, the employers' behaviours, attitudes and practices are informal, not often specified or documented, and hence they cannot easily be identified. Also the resistance of employers against changes and their strong determination to maintain privilege and the status quo through their hiring practices

are oftentimes obscured, leaving it a merit-based issue, personal and private, with no one else to blame. This may also have been validated by a policy discourse entrenched in market values, competitiveness, and individualism (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002: p. 132). As a result, employers are still underrepresented in the development of strategies to help immigrants into the workforce.

My MRP makes an attempt to tap into the issue of newcomers' access to employment through the lens of employers; it raises four key questions: Who are these employers? Whom do these employers hire and why? What are current recruiting and selection practices in the labour market generated by employers? And how do such hiring practices disadvantage newcomer job seekers, deliberately or inadvertently? So the intention of my research is to capture the hiring attitudes and practices of employers that disproportionately disadvantage newcomers.

Following these four questions, my research has arrived at the following key findings that can be organized along four main themes.

- Conceptual Gap points to the disconnect between the issues of immigration and skill shortages in the perception of employers and hiring managers. This conceptual divergence results in employers maintaining the status quo in their hiring practices.

- Built on this conceptual gap, Social Practices and Hiring Strategies captures the employers' preferred approaches in the hiring process, which heavily rely on informal contact, recruiters and internal referral. Such practices constructed on the existing networks and social norms largely exclude newcomer job seekers.

- Technological Usage includes a major shift in the use of technology with respect to screening and soliciting potential employees, such as Human Resources Information System (HRIS),

OCR, Listservs, etc. These new technologies built on locally pre-established social connection and professional achievement disproportionately disadvantage newcomer job seekers.

- The most important finding is cultural barriers that play a defining role throughout these themes. The discussion of cultural barriers touches on how employers interpret newcomer job seekers' personal attributes based on mainstream social and corporate cultural norms. It examines the changing relationship between companies and communities and consequently the power shift in the hiring process. This power imbalance between employers and job seekers reinforces the cultural gauges in measuring job seekers, which severely disadvantages newcomer job seekers.

Encompassing the current themes in the public and academic discourses, rather than situating the issue only within the labour market, my research looks at the broader demographic and social characteristics entailed and examines what these practices connote in wider social, cultural and economic contexts. This descriptive study intends to bring employers under the spotlight and make room for further research departing from here. It sheds some light on how the larger society can improve to better integrate newcomers into the labour market. It also provides some insight into possible policy strategies for policy-makers and other stakeholders to better address the issue. The geographical focus of this research is primarily on Canada's urban centres, which serve as the major reception areas of recent immigrants.

Chapter 1
Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

The existing research all points out that the breakdown occurs in newcomers' access to acquiring the first job in Canada, which plays a crucial role in their long-term labour market integration, civic engagement, and ultimate social inclusion. In public discourse, there are three main approaches conceptualizing this issue, which are situated on three levels: micro level, meso level, and macro level. However, these three approaches have fundamentally different ideas about discrimination and the barriers to immigrants' labour market integration. As a result, different theoretical orientations have influenced their different findings, and consequently different implications for the immigrant population as well as their influence on policy making and the delivery of related services.

Micro level

On micro level, human capital theory, originated by economists Jacob Mincer (1958) and Gary Becker (1964), emphasizes that education and experience largely account for differences in individual income. Some typical human capital variables recorded by researchers include parental background, level of education, occupational training, work experience, language proficiency, and duration of residence (Hirschmann 1982; Morawska 1990; Hiebert 1993). It is therefore taken for granted that immigrants who come to Canada with higher educational levels have more to offer, since higher education is equated with higher earnings or productivity. This economic view considers a person's education as a form of human capital that requires an investment and that yields a return in the labour market (Li 2003: p. 100). This theory has been widely applied in constructing Canada's immigration system, which favours immigrants

equipped with this type of human capital who are able to contribute more to Canada's knowledge-based economy. Li (2003) points out that the thrust of human capital theory is on individual self-effort and open market competition, rather than structural constraints, as key determinants of economic outcomes. Consequently, factors such as discrimination and unequal treatments are seldom considered in the framework of human capital theory (p. 101). Stemming from this theory, discrimination in the labour market is deemed a result of obstacles facing newcomer job seekers upgrading their official language skills, in particular occupation-oriented language skills, as well as getting their foreign credentials and work experience recognized. Departures from this paradigm suggest that there is a certain degree of truth to the idea that education obtained outside of Canada might not necessarily provide the same skills as would Canadian education institutions. And therefore whether newcomers are able to translate their human capital achieved in their home country to the Canadian context needs proving. Newcomer job seekers are particularly put on the spot if their first language is not English or French, which severely limits their ability to immediately apply their human capital effectively in the workplace. Oftentimes, the judgement is not just a simple pass or fail formula following certain set criteria but based on perception and available information on the worth of potential employees. So decisions about employment are understood in terms of economic calculation. Different methodologies used in two estimates of the economic impact of immigrant skill underutilization (Reitz 2001; Watt and Bloom 2001) have both produced figures of an annual loss of some $2 billion. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that this underemployment costs the Canadian economy between $3.5 and $5 billion per year (The Public Policy Forum 2004: p. 55). Human capital theory is able to identify the gaps in the current settlement services affecting the successful transference of immigrants' human capital. However, constructs from this model direct attention to the characteristics of individuals, rather than the supply of jobs and

practices and preferences of employers. Li (2003) further stresses that pre-existing racial and gender pay inequity are features of Canadian society and not of immigrants. It would be incorrect to attribute earnings disparity arising from these sources to immigrants, their human capital level, or other individual characteristics (p. 122).

Meso level

On meso level, two theories have emerged to conceptualize immigrants' declining labour market performance. Social capital theory focuses on immigrants' social network initially connecting them to the Canadian labour market, and two-tier system theory delineates the changing structure in the relationship between the state and immigrant services agencies (ISA's) in the light of neo-liberalism as well as the essential role ISA's play in bridging immigrant job seekers into the stratified Canadian labour market.

Social capital theory begins with ideas of human capital, but focuses on variation in immigrants' human capital and the contingencies of settlement. Following this theory, community network is essential for newcomers to adapt to their new country. This adaptation process may take longer time and involve more difficulties for ethnic communities with a relatively short history in the host society. So discrimination is often seen in terms of the exclusion of immigrants from networks providing critical local knowledge and job information. Harvey (2001) records the employers' preferred approaches in the hiring process, which heavily rely on informal contact, recruiters and internal referral. And how such practice disadvantages newcomer job seekers inadvertently because of their lack of social capital in their newly adopted society. Reitz (2000) speaks about the use of reference checking in employment decisions, which is frequently accompanied by informal processes of skill validation, such as reliance on personal references.

Newcomer job seekers often fall outside the knowledge of referees typically consulted as their non-existent connection to the local labour market network.

Another fold of social capital theory often points to a lack of community support resulting from recency of the ethnic group's presence in Canadian society. A typical example in this aspect is the research "Employment Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Women" from Preston and Man (1999), in which they state that with a relatively short history of immigration and limited financial resources, the Mainland Chinese community is also less well developed than its Hong Kong counterpart. As a result, many Mainland immigrants find less-skilled jobs in Cantonese-Chinese community, who financially dominates the ethnic economy. Many other scholars have contributed their research pertaining to the rising refugee population and how their lack of ethnic and family support contribute to their poor labour market performance (Pfeifer 1999).

Social capital theory recognizes the key role social network plays in the entrance of newcomers into the labour market. And it manages to capture patterns of how this plays out in the human resources management and how it disadvantages newcomer job seekers. However, this model does not tell us what social phenomena in broader context account for the penalty paid by new immigrants and cannot provide substantial evidence on why the penalty declines in recent period compared with the earlier immigrant cohorts of similar social capital background.

Two-tier system theory particularly examines the changing structure in the settlement service sector and how that contributes to the newcomers' position in the labour market. Sadiq (2005) illustrates the two-tier settlement: system and spatial mismatch. In Ontario, neither the federal nor the provincial governments provide direct service to newcomers. The federal government

contracts out services while the provincial government has competitive purchase-of-service

agreements with non-profit NGOs and some for-profit firms (p. 2). In the meantime, there is a

shift of state responsibility first downward to not-for-profit community-based settlement agencies.

They are only quasi-autonomous with a heavy dependence on government contracts for funding

(Jackson and Sanger 2003: p. 18). The restructuring of government's relationship to the not-for-

profit sector has recently caused the shift from core funding to program-based funding or

purchase-of-service contract system. For settlement agencies this means that they can only get

funding from government if their programs are deemed appropriate. In fact, some 189, or 67.5

percent of the identified agencies (including branches) listed the federal government as a source

of funding (Lim, Lo, Siemiatycki and Doucet 2005: pp. 16-17). So, competition over limited

funding among settlement agencies has forced many particularly ethnic-based agencies to replace

their own community-based services with more generic ones. These agencies are increasingly

becoming government's contractors. We are seeing growing monopolization within the not-for-

profit immigrant services sector and the loss of diversity of alternative services (Richmond and

Shields 2004: p. 4). The neo-liberal restructuring has a further implication in this snowballing of

downloading, from not-for-profit sector responsibility to the market hence individual

responsibility. In grappling with the growing demand for settlement services and funding, many

not-for-profit settlement agencies are moving into fee-for-service programs to generate revenue.

A conceivable impact of that is these programs will be only offered to people who can afford

them. The dismantling of social support programs and the fostering of highly bifurcated labour

markets undermine immigrants' ability to successfully integrate into their host society (Man 2004:

p. 137).

Community-based settlement agencies serve a crucial function in the first few years of a newcomer's life. Their mandates, capacities and connections are key to newcomers' building their initial social capital. As many settlement agencies are entering into a contractual relationship with government, their vision gives way to funding needs. Many settlement agencies now serve as job-hunters for ethnic-based businesses or lower-end jobs instead of focussing on long-term alternatives to upgrade newcomers' skills. This further deteriorates newcomers' labour market integration and their social status. The implication of two-tier system theory in policy making is strongly manifested in the new Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), in which it clearly states the harmonization of federal and provincial settlement programs will be one of the key working areas so that settlement service providers can best utilize funding resources to deliver their programs in a more responsive and efficient way. On top of that, there has been a recent shift in governmental strategies towards helping build the capacity of smaller ethno-specific settlement agencies. Many large settlement agencies, like COSTI, have been involved in this capacity building project, which has seen some positive outcome.

Two-tier system theory seems to be able to capture the structural changes in service providers and the consequent impacts on newcomers' access to the labour market since the 1980s and provides a reasonable answer to the disparity of the statuses and earnings between immigrant cohorts before and after this point. However, the theory itself is still not sufficient to explain wider issues arising from recent immigrants' diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Macro level

On macro level, racialization or vertical mosaic (Porter 1965) theory argues that race is not an inherent characteristic of individuals, but is socially constructed. Therefore attention should be

directed to the characteristics of the majority institutions. One of the most prominent research

papers is from Galabuzi (2001), who states that race has been and continues to be a major factor

in determining access to economic opportunity in Canada. The author takes a historic approach

in analyzing Canada's immigration policy and the embeddedness of racism reflected in our

policy. It allows us to shift the emphasis away from the discourse of measuring discrimination in

income and towards a more rounded assessment of the contribution of racial discrimination to

the disadvantaged position of the racialized group in the labour market. The author identifies

systemic racism as the major contributing factor to racialized immigrant population's poor

labour market performance. He raises the concept of democratic racism, which has become

entrenched in mainstream institutions. In another important research project, Teelucksingh and

Galabuzi (2005) analyzed the census data and conclude that among all the census groups, the

biggest decline in labour market participation can be observed in racialized groups as a whole,

which even surpasses that of immigrant groups (Table 1). Teelucksingh and Galabuzi (2005)

**Table 1: Labour Force Participation Rates for Immigrants,
Non-Immigrants, and Visible Minorities (%) (1981-2001)**

Census Group	1981	1991	2001
Total Labour Force	75.5	78.2	80.3
Canadian Born	74.6	78.7	81.8
All Immigrants	79.3	77.2	75.6
Recent Immigrants	75.7	68.6	65.8
Visible Minorities	N/A	70.5	66.0

Source: Statistics Canada

disclose that racialized group members and new immigrants continue to sustain a double-digit

income gap and a higher rate of unemployment. Between 1996 and 2001 censuses, they

experienced a median after tax income gap of 13.3 percent and an average after tax income gap of 12.2 percent (p. 3). This gap is evident among the university educated (median gap 14.6 percent) as well as those without post-secondary education (20.6 percent) suggesting a cross social class factor (p. 3). They further disclose that the labour market is segmented along racial lines, with racialized group members overrepresented in many low paying occupations such as the textile, light manufacturing and service sectors and underrepresented in the better paying, more secure jobs (p. 4). Based on this data analysis, recent immigrants who also belong to visible minorities are worst off in the labour market, suffering from a "double negative" effect. In his very recent report, Ornstein (2006) discovers that all 20 of the poorest ethno-racial groups in the Toronto CMA are non-European. Therefore, extreme economic disadvantage is highly racialized. Data show that in 1971 members of non-European ethno-racial groups accounted for only five percent of the CMA population of about 2.6 million, compared to nearly 40 percent of the 2001 population of 4.6 million (Ornstein 2006: p. iii). Reitz (2000) points to the fact that why immigrants fall behind in the new environment is that the immigrant/native-born disparity in the value of skills has actually been increasing over time. Through substantial quantitative analysis, he concludes that as the labour market shifts toward a greater emphasis on education and knowledge-based skills, Canadian employers are making a sharper distinction between the skills of the native-born and those of immigrants (p. 597). He argues that one possibility is that these negative trends could be caused by increased prejudice and discrimination based on race, perhaps a backlash due to high levels of non-European immigration (Reitz 2000: p. 584). This segmentation in the labour market along racial lines is usually testified through the earnings disparity between racialized groups and non-racialized groups (Judge Rosalie Abella 1984; Abu-Laban 2002; Li 2003; and Alboim, Finnie and Meng 2005). Based on this achieved groundwork to expose income inequality, Galabuzi (2001) discloses the fact that racialized community

members are over-represented in low paying sectors of the economy and in the higher paying jobs in those sectors. This sectoral segregation is a major reason for the lower incomes of the racialized group. Reitz and Breton (1994) further suggest that such discrimination may indeed be a serious problem in Canadian society, no less so than in the United States. Other academics state that it is not clear that such discrimination is increasing, which would be to explain the declining labour market performance among recent racialized immigrants. Some academics have even argued that racial acceptance in Canada has become more tolerant causing increased sensitivity to racial equity and reduced racial discrimination (Swan et al., 1991). However, Taifel and Turner (1986) argue that such a statement does not adequately capture the social psychological bases of racial discrimination. The obligations to political correctness might hide deeper resentments against racial minorities that are often diverted through hidden discriminatory hiring practices. Kluegel and Smith (1986) bring this one step forward by stating that racial attitudes may change while intergroup behaviour does not. Moreover, large-scale immigration in the last couple of decades and rapid population growth may alter intergroup relations, which has negative consequences in racially biased employment patterns (Bobo, 1999; Esses, Jackson, and Armstrong, 1998).

Racialization theory emphasizes the social creation of difference by the majority population, and its role in social exclusion of "visible minority" groups (Ornstein 2006: p. 87). Such theory puts a much clearer responsibility on the mainstream society and institutions residing in it, but the racially-biased behaviours, attitudes, and practices of mainstream institutions in the labour market are not explored in depth.

Social inclusion theory

The aforementioned three levels of paradigms are intertwined and none of them can fully explain the issue of access to employment alone. I deem settlement should not just focus on individual immigrant's adaptation and adjustment process, which is microstructural processes. Therefore, this study makes an attempt to go beyond the individual to investigate the interaction between the individual and the macrostructure, and to look at how socially constructed opportunities and limitations rooted in institutional and organizational processes shape the individual immigrant's life. Taking that into account, I adopt social inclusion theory as developed by Omidvar and Richmond (2003) on the basis of traditional social inclusion/exclusion theories to better conceptualize this issue.

In the wake of the Second World War and the following economic boom throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of universal health and welfare systems dominated the policy discourse in the West, particularly in Europe. As a result, most European and North American governments developed comprehensive health and social insurance programs. However, the 1980s witnessed a swift shift in western countries from the traditional industrial economy to knowledge and technology-based post-industrial economy. This rapid labour market change brought about growing social divides and the existing welfare systems were no longer able to meet the changing needs of the new populations. Social inclusion theory was initially developed in France with a specific goal of reintegrating large numbers of unemployed ex-industrial workers and young people who were largely excluded in the new economy. The theory is not, however, just a response to this exclusion (Omidvar and Richmond 2003: p. viii). Increasingly, the concept was adopted to tackle the health and welfare crises. As the concept gained credence in the rest of Europe, it incorporated non-traditional target groups such as racial minorities, the elderly, youth

and people with disabilities as sections of the population in need of deliberate social inclusion programs (Omidvar and Richmond 2003: p. 10). In this process, new values of inclusion were added – characterized by a society's widely shared experience and active participation, by a broad equality of opportunities and life chances for individuals and by the achievement of basic level of well-being for all citizens (Sen 2001). Omidvar and Richmond (2003) point out that social exclusion is a way of understanding the impact of existing social economic systems on marginalized groups, while social inclusion is about finding out what works and mobilizing resources to resolve the problems brought about through social exclusion (p. 11). Therefore, social inclusion in the current social context serves as a new vehicle to equity and a holistic approach to policy-making and programming in the understanding of shared experiences.

The Laidlaw Foundation's Children's Agenda program first began exploring social inclusion in 2000 as a way to re-focus child and family policy. In exposing the dramatic downward shift in the economic status of newcomers to Canada over the last two decades, Omidvar and Richmond raise the conceptual framework to a higher level. By taking into account multiple perspectives, they further developed social inclusion theory.

> Social inclusion involves the basic notions of belonging, acceptance and recognition. For immigrants and refugees, social inclusion would be represented by the realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in their new country. In a simple but useful sense, therefore, social inclusion for immigrants and refugees can be seen as the dismantling of barriers that lead to exclusion in all these domains (Omidvar and Richmond 2003: p. 1).

They further argue that whether the source of exclusion is poverty, racism, fear of differences or lack of political clout, the consequences are the same: a lack of recognition and acceptance; powerlessness and 'voicelessness'; economic vulnerability; and, diminished life experiences and

limited life prospects (Omidvar and Richmond 2003: p. viii). Consequently, the marginalization of individuals may pose a serious threat to cohesion and prosperity for society as a whole. It is suggested that public policy must be more closely linked to the lived experiences of immigrant and refugee families, both in terms of the actual programs and in terms of the process for arriving at those policies and programs (Omidvar and Richmond 2003, p. vii). One of the biggest implications of this theory is the growing focus in research-based government policy making on cities, communities, and individuals. In recent years, under this new direction, more community groups have been identified and their stories have been brought to attention for necessary policy improvement and program support.

Under the social inclusion framework, this research will deconstruct the deficit model of newcomer job seekers by examining the divergence between national interest and employers' interest. It intends to promote a higher degree of understanding among policy-makers as well as employers toward newcomer job seekers based on their lived experiences, and seek more equitable and holistic policy support.

Chapter 2
Conceptual Gap

How urgent are labour shortages?

The Canadian labour market is facing significant challenges in order to maintain its competitive edge in the fast-growing global economy. Demographic trends combined with anticipated growth in demands for skills increasingly point to skill shortages as a serious issue to be faced by business, labour, governments, and the educational community (CLBC 2002: p. 3). In fact, this issue has become a national priority and received great attention in copious research papers as well as public discussions. "CLBC Handbook – Immigration & Skill Shortages" published by the Canadian Labour and Business Centre (CLBC 2004: pp. 3-4) illustrates some key indicators related to the urgency of this issue:

- Canada's labour force growth is expected to remain below one percent over the next three decades;

- The Canadian workforce is rapidly aging with workers 45 years of age and over forming an increasing share of the labour force. They accounted for 26 percent of the total labour force in 1990, while the same group made up 34 percent in 2002;

- The near retirement population is growing with the median retirement age at 61.8.

In the Canadian context, employers are increasingly concerned about issues of recruitment, retention and knowledge transfer in dealing with skills acquisition and retention. In April and May 2002, CLBC mailed 6,100 survey questionnaires to business, labour and public sector leaders (education, health and government) and received 1,145 responses by mid-June. Among 39 issues identified, skill shortages ranked among the top ten issues of serious concern. Half or

more of both managers and labour leaders viewed it as a serious problem facing the economy and labour market. Skill shortages was the second most serious issue in the public sector. 57 percent of managers said it was a serious problem and a further 40 percent responded it was a moderate problem. One latest survey of business, labour and pubic sector leaders conducted by CLBC in 2005 received 1,169 completed questionnaires including 728 private and public sector managers and 441 private and public sector labour leaders. According to the survey, 57 percent of private sector managers and 58 percent of public sector managers deemed shortage of skilled labour a serious problem. Such issue is more acute for public sector managers for it is their number one concern (Lochhead 2006: p. 10). The breakdown shows that the most commonly identified occupational shortages by private sector managers are in trades with 23 percent of them experiencing current shortages and 32 percent experiencing or anticipating shortages. In the public sector, professions are identified most as occupational shortages with 32 percent of the managers experiencing current shortages and as high as 51 percent experiencing or anticipating shortages (Lochhead 2006: pp. 23-26). The problem is particularly persistent for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and has been compounded in the last decade by a high level of job growth within the SME sector (Dulipovici 2003: p. 1). A report issued in April 2002 by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) pointed to approximate 265,000 full-time openings at SMEs across Canada. Significantly, 186,000 of those positions (more than 70 percent) had been vacant for at least four months (Mallett 2002: p. 3). Around the same time, 40 percent of respondents to an Ipsos-Reid poll said a dearth of skilled and technical labour was inhibiting their growth (Portsmouth 2003).

How do employers address current labour shortages?

Despite the fact that Canadian employers are in desperate need of skilled professionals and

tradespeople, the immigrant workforce is still facing extreme difficulties finding employment. Research has discovered that many employers, even those experiencing skill shortages in regions with traditionally high levels of immigration, do not see immigration as a way to fill current or future skill shortages (CLBC 2004: p. 1). Between June and August 2004, Environics Research Group conducted a national phone survey of 2,091 business owners, managers, administrators, human resource managers and others responsible for hiring employees (hereafter referred to as "employers"). Some of the survey results were surprising. For example, when asked "Is it likely that your organization would use any of the following strategies in addressing its labour needs?", only 20 percent of employers answered they would hire recent immigrants with foreign training. The highest percentage (68 percent) of companies would upgrade the skills of current employees and implementing specific measures that will encourage current employees to stay with the organization (60 percent). If companies have to hire someone from outside, they would go for younger people just entering the labour market (50 percent) (The Public Policy Forum and Environics Research Group 2004: p. 7). The survey also demonstrated that regional difference was not as big a factor as people may assume in employers' attitudes toward this issue. It found that employers, whether located in immigrant destination cities like Toronto or non-destination areas such as Atlantic Canada, consistently rank hiring immigrants as a way to address further labour market needs lower than upgrading the skills of current employees; implementing specific measures that will encourage current employees to stay with the organization; hiring more young people; hiring aboriginals; changing job descriptions to reallocate work; and attracting workers form other organizations or companies.

Such overall perception of immigration as a low priority by employers as a whole is reflected in other research as well. In an early 2000 survey of public and private sector employers and labour

leaders conducted by CLBC (Sangster 2001), respondent were asked to rate the seriousness of a number of national-level issues facing the economy. Of 25 issues listed, immigration level ranked last with only 10 to 15 percent of employers viewing is as a 'serious problem'. Similarly, fewer than 20 percent of employers felt that greater emphasis should be given to increasing immigration. In the meantime, skill shortages was ranked among the top five most serious issues by responding employers. This result clearly suggests a disconnect between a concern about skill shortages and an employer's interest in immigration as a key source of skilled labour. It implies that as a whole, employers have not fully noted the contribution of immigration in addressing labour shortages. This conceptual gap among employers leads to their overlooking the immigrant workforce as a resource pool in addressing their labour needs, diverging from the goal of Canada's current immigration policy. The report also points out that the vast majority of employers are even less aware of the issue of credential assessment. The fact that employers have not raised this issue as an important one detrimental to their business clearly indicates that they have not conceptually made the linkage between our immigration and labour needs.

The CLBC 2005 survey arrived at similar findings. When asked what actions do business see as most important in addressing their human resource and skills requirements over the next five years, the top five actions (out of 16) employers identified were: taking specific measures to retain current employees; upgrading skills of current employees; improving succession planning; hiring young labour market entrants; and mentoring of young workers (Lochhead 2006: p. 32). Based on the top three actions, one could argue that this result only shows that employers are most inclined to focus on retention and investment in upgrading of current employees than hiring outside job seekers, which is solely a business strategy. However, it does suggest that when it comes to hiring new entrants, they prefer young labour market entrants to the skilled immigrant

job force. In fact, the bottom five actions employers answered "not important" include hiring new immigrants for public sector and hiring visible minorities for private sector (Lochhead 2006: p. 34). This finding is telling in that the difference may be understood that public sector employers are more likely to take into account the existing federal Employment Equity Act (EEA), which demands a true representation of visible minorities in the workplace, as well as possibly internal employment equity and anti-racism policies. Under these principles, employers make a distinction between non-immigrant visible minorities and newly arrived visible minorities. However for private sector employers, visible minorities, regardless of their immigration status, are largely constructed into the same group and fall out of the consideration. This disturbing finding seems to indicate that race may still remain as a persistent factor in recruitment planning among employers. The fuzzy line between immigrants and visible minorities reflected in their perception further speaks to a prevailing conceptual gap.

The CLBC 2002 Survey further provided some convincing figures to expose this conceptual gap between the issues of immigration levels and skill shortages among employers and labour leaders. It disclosed that immigration levels were not judged as a serious problem (Table 2). When asked whether "too-low immigration level" was a problem for the economy and labour market, most respondents said it was "not a problem". This view was held by 48 percent of public sector managers and 53 percent of private sector managers. Even when "too-low immigration level" was seen as a problem, it was more likely to be considered a moderate problem. Relatively small percentages of managers (l4 percent in both the public sector and private sector) viewed "too-low immigration level" as a "serious problem". Interestingly, similar results were found among managers and labour leaders in response to whether "too-high immigration level" was a

Table 2: Leadership Views on Immigration Levels, 2002

In your view, how serious are the following issues facing the economy and labour market?

Respondents	Managers		Labour Leaders	
	Public Sector (%)	Private Sector (%)	Public Sector (%)	Private Sector (%)
Too-Low Immigration Level				
Not a problem	48	53	47	51
Moderate problem	39	33	42	39
Serious Problem	14	14	11	10
Too-High Immigration Level				
Not a problem	64	52	58	43
Moderate Problem	22	27	28	34
Serious problem	14	22	14	23

Source: Canadian Labour and Business Centre, Viewpoints 2002 Leadership Survey

problem. 64 percent of public sector managers and 52 percent of private sector managers deemed "too-high immigration level" "not a problem". Surprisingly, agreement was also found among labour leaders, who would be normally expected to see immigration as a threat to the job security of their members. 58 percent of public sector labour leaders as well as 43 percent of private sector labour leaders perceived "Too high immigration" "not a problem". It was also more likely to be considered a moderate problem when "too-high immigration level" was seen as a problem. Only 14 percent of public sector managers and 22 percent of private sector managers considered it a "serious problem". These findings suggest that for the most part, immigration levels are not viewed as excessively high or low, insofar as they would constitute serious problems for the Canadian economy (Lochhead 2003: p. 7). Such view may be held by the larger society, of which employers are as a matter of fact only a part. Correspondingly, with regard to the question "How does concern about immigration levels rank in relation to other issues?", concern

about immigration levels ranked very low out of the 39 issues presented for evaluation (Table 3).

Table 3: How "Immigration Levels" Ranks as An Issue of Serious Concern

Leadership	Too-High Immigration Level		Too-Low Immigration Level	
	Rank among 39 Issues	A "Serious Problem"	Rank among 39 Issues	A "Serious Problem"
Public Sector Manager	No.34	14%	No.36	14%
Private Sector Manager	No.25	22%	No.32	14%
Public Sector Labour	No.35	14%	No.38	11%
Private Sector Labour	No.33	23%	No.39	10%

Source: Canadian Labour and Business Centre, Viewpoints 2002 Leadership Survey

"Too high immigration levels" was rated the 34th most serious issue among public sector managers the 25th among private sector managers. Concern about "too low immigration levels" ranked even lower as number.36 serious issue by public sector managers and number 32 by private sector managers.

Stemming from this contextualization, private sector managers ranked "upgrading the skills of current employees" the number one action to address skill requirements with 59 percent saying it was very important. In the public sector, 63 percent of managers cited "improving succession planning" as the number one action (Lochhead 2003: pp. 14-15). This again illustrates that most of the top priorities including upgrading employee skills, mentoring, retention measures and success planning only focus on actions targeting the existing workforce. Only 9 percent of managers viewed the hiring of foreign-trained workers as a "very important action". In fact, 64 percent of private sector managers and 53 percent of public sector managers deemed hiring

foreign-trained workers "not important" in addressing skill requirements. And again surprisingly, the uneven settlement patterns of new immigrants do not seem to cause substantial changes in employers' opinions in different regions of the country. Currently, close to 90 percent (89 percent) of the recent immigrant labour force resides in three provinces: Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec. However, the data shows that even in these major immigrant receiving provinces, the hiring of foreign-trained workers is commonly viewed as "not important". For example in Ontario, where 56 percent of the recent immigrant labour force is located, 51 percent of private sector managers and 59 percent of public sector managers say hiring foreign-trained workers is "not important" in addressing their organization's skill requirements. About one third of these managers said it was somewhat important, while only about 10 percent said it was very important (Lochhead 2003: p. 16). Furthermore, the perceived importance of hiring immigrant workers as a solution to address skill needs only increases modestly among firms with potentially more urgent skill requirements. Again in the case of Ontario, managers expecting 10 percent or more of their current employees to retire in the next five years were only somewhat more likely than those with fewer expected retirements to say that hiring foreign-trained workers was a very important action (15 percent versus 8 percent) (Lochhead 2003: p. 17). This finding seems quite ironic given that 97 percent of Ontario's labour force growth in the past decade was due to immigration.

CFIB (2002) conducted a survey between September and November 2002, and received 6,740 responses in total. SMEs is a sector where most current job growth occurs. For all the provinces, the majority said that the business employment growth expectations for the next three years were keep to about the same level of employment or increase employment (e.g. Ontario: 50.9 percent and 43.1 percent). The majority of employers thought it would become harder to find employees

in the next three years (e.g. Ontario: 55.5 percent). However, when asked "Has your firm had any experience in hiring new immigrants", more than half said no experience (e.g. Ontario: 63.1 percent). Instead of utilizing immigrant resources to fill the gap, the majority of the firms had seen an increase in training costs in terms of time and money per employee (Ontario: 56.7 percent responded increased) to fill specific skill requirements. In response to the question "What could governments do to reduce the shortage of labour", "allow more flexible immigration practices" ranked No. 6 (e.g. Ontario: 14 percent). In answering "What could businesses do to reduce the shortage of labour", respondents only ranked "sponsor immigrants" No.7 (e.g. Ontario: 11.9 percent). The survey results correspond to the previous findings and portray a clear conceptual gap.

Social construction of deficit model and its contributing factors

The Environics' report (2004) suggests a hidden quota for the immigrant workforce placed by many employers who believe that they have already maximized hiring immigrants as a human resource solution (p. 8). Employers in traditional destination cities, especially Toronto and Vancouver, already think that they are hiring immigrants in numbers consistent with the existing demographic profile (p. 3). All the above findings reveal a grave situation in the contemporary Canadian labour market that the majority of public and private sector employers do not view the hiring of foreign trained workers as an essential strategy to mitigate the labour shortages as well as address the skill requirements. The idea of hiring recent immigrants is contextualized as a peripheral hiring channel. As several of the survey findings suggest, employers would only look at immigrants if they were unable to find right candidates among other groups. As a matter of the fact, protection of domestic employment opportunities has been a historic need. Therefore in this initial conceptual stage, immigrant job seekers are deemed non-Canadian, construed as a

burden, a deficit to the local labour structure and subsequently constructed into the bottom of the hiring hierarchy. This deficit model strongly contradicts to the cream of the crop model reflected in Canada's immigrant selection system, which serves as a key leverage to Canada's labour force growth.

Several factors may have contributed to this conceptual gap. First and foremost, the deficit model contributes to the pathologization of immigrants and is a continuation of Canada's perception of immigrants historically. Despite the drastic changes in the make-up of recent immigrant cohorts, the connotation of "immigrants" has not fundamentally changed. The typical image of immigrants is people who are in need of help and struggling to be integrated into the mainstream society. In the 2005 Canadian HR Reporter survey (2005), when asked "Are you concerned about how your employees will interact with skilled immigrants?", 23 (17 percent) out of 133 employers responded "yes". One of the respondents stated, "I believe the perception of Canadians in general is that the hiring of a skilled immigrant is a sort of patronage" (p. 11). As Bambrah (2005) points out that in Canada's labour market it is still "Canadian first", not "Canada first" (p. 18). Such concept is further legitimized departing from the obscured perception of Canadians. As the Toronto Star report (March 4, 2006) points out that such premise is based on our own conceit. We like to think Canada is the envy of the world, the destination of choice for everyone seeking opportunity and the rewards that go to the skilled and the talented (p. 16).

Second, employers generally lack information about the current trend of immigration and immigrant composition. This partially attributes to the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) exam system. Surprisingly, the current curriculum for CHRP exam, which is the most

creditable testing system for human resources professionals, contains zero components related to the current immigration or the immigrant workforce.

What's more, a very limited role of employers can be observed in the policy and decision-making processes. Due to a general suspicion around government intervention of corporate hiring decisions, employers are still underrepresented in discussions around strategies to better utilize immigrant talents.

As the definition of "social inclusion" remains fluid and open to debate, and is ultimately shaped by political and ideological convictions (Omidvar and Richmond 2003: p. 1), I would apply this theory in this context as a means of reconceptualizing the fundamental issue of *us* versus *them*, *centre* versus *periphery*. Therefore, it is not just about helping immigrants, but about changing our mindset and repositioning ourselves in relation to newcomers. It is about breaking boundaries as well as sustaining potential productivity of business and economy.

This conceptual gap is closely linked to the next chapter, which examines employers' social practices and hiring strategies, and how this initial conceptual gap among employers further validates and reinforces their subsequent hiring preferences.

Chapter 3
Social Practices and Hiring Strategies

Changes in job search strategies and hiring strategies

The changes in job search strategies over time correlate with the implicit changes in employers'
hiring strategies. In the Late Industrial Age, the period from the end of the First World War to
the late 1970s, credentialization and networking represented the two main job search strategies.
Credentialization strategies were about matching key criteria including degrees and work
experience with formal candidate search. With appropriate credentials, networking strategies
were often used to collect additional information through formal and informal networks.

The following Early Silicon Age starting in the early 1980s marked the drastic social changes
represented by restructuring, mergers, and acquisitions, which gave birth to radically new job
search strategies. Personal resumes became the dominant feature in this age. In the meantime, a
number of cost cutting measures, formal and informal, have been put in place along the way.

Formal hiring strategies

As the contemporary labour market is becoming more fast-paced and competitive, one obvious
trend is a rise in the use of recruiters to handle the hiring process, which is lengthy, time
consuming and requires a level of both technical and human resources knowledge. For instance
in Toronto's IT market alone, there are over 200 recruiting agencies. Therefore, the top priority
for them to survive and maintain an advantage in this highly competitive market is to
recommend the best fit applicant who can fill the vacancy quickly with a high success rate, not to
understand necessarily who is the best qualified applicant. There is a huge incentive for doing so

as employers usually pay substantial amounts of money for locating the best candidates. As Harvey (2001) records that one of the large recruiting firms, CNC Global, receives over 20,000 applications a month and selects one to three best candidates from these. Ajilon, another large recruiter in the Toronto area receives 8,000 applications for 500 jobs (p. 17). As a result, the organizational fit becomes imperative in selecting those with the right skills and personalities. Although these jobs are normally advertised to the general population, recruiting agencies will typically only focus their efforts on candidates who are already working in the field to ensure high success rates. Pre-screening process, telephone interview and request for local references are all geared to serve this purpose. Data shows that about 80 percent of current applicants are foreign trained professionals (Harvey 2001: p. 17). Unfortunately, newcomer job seekers are usually automatically deemed disqualified because of lacking of local work experience and references.

Apart from the difficulties facing newcomer job seekers succeeding in these open competitions, their experience is more negative in accessing the jobs that are not publicised. Similar to recruiters, search firms (also called executive search firms or headhunters) also work closely with employers upon their specific requests. In contrast to recruiting agencies, they initiate the contact with candidates through a variety of available sources to fill a specific opening for their client. Headhunters normally benefit from their clients by getting paid certain percentage of a successful candidate's first year salary, e.g. one third for a controller. In return, they must reach an agreement on certain terms with their clients, including confidentiality, off limits, and most importantly, retention. Most employers consider retention rates essential to their business operations, so headhunters would usually agree to help the company locate another recruit if one that is placed fails to last one year – and they do this for no additional fee (Ployhart, Schneider, and Schmitt 2006: p. 282). Therefore, in this high-stake career matching business, the

candidate's retention rate is more closely linked to the headhunter's economic interest and reputation. They choose to reduce the risk to the minimum in order to make the most effective match. Newcomer job seekers are generally considered a potential risk factor due to certain degree of unfamiliarity with their education background and work experience.

Informal hiring strategies

Other than the formal hiring strategies dependent on recruiting agencies and headhunters, the majority of hiring strategies have become centred around informal candidate search. This trend is strongly supported by a number of studies examining the effects of different sources of recruitment, which have clearly shown that informal sources of recruitment tended to produce candidates that had a lower turnover and a better "fit" than recruitment through more formal channels (Saks 1994). As Bolles (2004) puts it, they are less expensive than formal processes and dovetailed nicely with the emphasis on networking in the new job-search practices.

One of the main hiring strategies in using informal resources is through internal referral systems, which are a result of the restructuring of human resources strategies. Incentives normally ranging from $2,000 – 5,000 are offered to employees referring qualified candidates to the company who are successfully hired and pass through the probation period (Harvey 2001: p. 18). This strategy greatly reduces the cost of hiring a recruiting firm and helps employers fully take advantage of informal networks available. The CFIB 2002 Survey (2002) discovered that among all the provinces and territories, "referrals from friends and employees" was rated the most effective ways of recruiting employees, e.g. 66.5 percent employers in Ontario (p. 1). It is particularly favoured by industries such as IT, where recruiting and advertising costs are prohibitive. SMEs are also heavily, if not exclusively, reliant on such hiring method. For seven out of ten SMEs,

referrals from friends and current employees are the most effective way of recruiting (Dulipovici 2003: p. 3). Most SMEs do not have HR departments or staff designated to recruitment. Due to a lack of capacity or resources, the most cost-effective and risk-free way in their hiring practices is to acquire people through informal networks who can hit the ground running. However, these informal networks built on existing locally structured social networks largely exclude newcomer job seekers. First, in order to access these job opportunities, the job seeker must establish communication with people who already have access to these hidden jobs. This can be difficult for newcomer job seekers, who suffer from low social capital as a result of their limited residential period and low degree of engagement in the mainstream society. What is more important though, is that in order to establish networks with these people, the job seeker must present themselves as a potential member of their community. In other words, the job seeker must be a) someone who they will want to help with information, and b) someone who they will remember favourably (Tyrrell 1995: p. 9). Social identification serves as a huge factor written in the unspoken rules for this social contract. A deficit presumably, newcomer job seekers are often deemed a potential risk factor who may need further investment. As a result, newcomer job seekers are often found disproportionately unsuccessful in establishing this form of social network. Also given the fact that SMEs have been the main source of job creation in the last decade, particularly close to 70 percent of the new jobs in 1999 were generated by small businesses (Dulipovici 2003: p. 2), this may have a significantly negative impact on newcomer job seekers.

Internal promotion is another favourite informal means of filling company vacancies. This strategy also corresponds to the restructuring of HR management over the last two decades, which prioritizes low operating costs and low business risks. The costs that can be saved through internal recruiting are obvious, including those associated with selection, training and start-up

time. This is especially true when it comes to high-ranking management and professional

positions. What's more, internal employees already possess certain knowledge of the organization

and how it functions. This usually makes the adjustment process much easier than a newcomer

from the outside. Employers favour this strategy also because they can fully capitalize on internal

talents based on their track record and performance appraisal, which well demonstrate their skills

and values. As a result, entry-level positions actually are the ones most likely to be filled from the

outside. Due to the discriminatory factors existing in the labour market, newcomer job seekers

often make an attempt to obtain their first employment in Canada by applying for these entry-

level positions. However then, employers, who fear that they are only taking this opportunity as a

springboard to some better-paid job at first opportunity, consider them overqualified. What is

ironic is that the qualifications of newcomer job seekers, which were considered irrelevant in the

first place to commensurate employment, suddenly are deemed relevant in this context.

Divergence between hiring strategies and newcomer job search strategies

Job seekers apply different job search strategies in response to the aforementioned various hiring

strategies. In general, there are three major groupings of communicative media (Table 4). Among

these communication tools, newcomer job seekers generally lack the access in the third group

and also the second group to a large degree. They are heavily reliant on print media, particularly

electronic job postings. This greatly reduces their chances to access crucial HR information.

Studies have shown that the immigrant workforce is increasingly using the Internet to find

employment. For example, a Public Service Commission study in 2001 found that 68 percent of

visible minority respondents used the Internet to check jobs, including applying for jobs online

(73 percent); investigating the websites of potential employers (72 percent); and use email to

Table 4: Major Groupings of Communicative Media

Groupings	Communication Tools
Print Media	Newspapers, magazines, books, posting boards, certain forms of electronic bulletin boards (e.g. the Electronic Labour Exchange)
Electronic Media	List-servs, interactive databases, email, Multi User Dungeons (MUDs)
Personal Communications	Networking, (sub-)culturally specific interactional skills

Source: Tyrrell, Marc W.D., 1995

communicate with both contacts and potential employers (46 percent). The study concludes that when access to the Internet is available, visible minorities are intensive and consistent users of the Internet as a job search tool (Chatterton 2002: p. 27). And it is reasonable to presume that a significant percentage of the visible minority respondents are recent immigrants. However, the opposite of the fact that online job search is newcomers' primary strategy is the reality that only a small number of jobs are available through the Internet. In a study of 3,000 Internet-using job seekers, Forrester Research found that only 4 percent had actually landed their most recent job through the Internet (Bolles 2004: p. 32). Although the research was conducted in the US, it is suggested that likely similar ratios can be found in many other countries. Another study on employers came to a similar conclusion. Employment Management Association's 2000 "Cost per Hire and Staffing Metrics Survey" discovered that only 8 percent of employers' "new hires" were derived from the Internet (Bolles 2004: p. 32). This clearly demonstrates that the majority of jobs are traded in the "hidden job market". Research shows that an estimated 80 percent of job opportunities are never advertised. In some industries such as IT, the hidden job market is cited as high as 95 percent, which translates into 20,000 unfilled jobs not being advertised at all
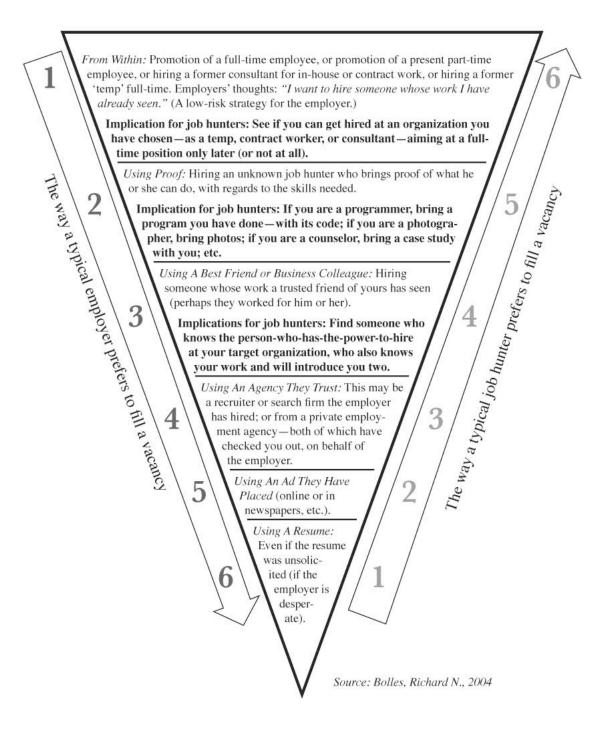
(Harvey 2001: p. 16). This mismatch between hiring strategies and job search strategies can be delineated in the following self-explanatory diagram (Diagram 1). The diagram clearly shows that most employers hunt for job seekers in the reverse order from how job seekers hunt for them. And for most newcomers, the two lowest levels are their only access to the labour market.

The above analyses seem to suggest that employers hire at the individual level but to produce results at the organizational level. The social practices carried out in their hiring strategies are primarily informal contact and referrals, aiming at maintaining homogeneity at the organizational level. This reproduction process is tied in with their organizational cultures to strengthen the power of dominant social groups. Such paradigm further reinforces the presumption that hiring of newcomer job seekers is considered a risk factor and may greatly reduce Return on Investment (ROI). Organizational justice theories model developed by Gilliland (1993) points out two kinds of fairness: process fairness and outcome fairness. He further identifies three rules contributing to outcome fairness:

- Equity: hiring decisions are based on test performance
- Equality: hiring decisions are made to be equal across racial and gender subgroups
- Needs: hiring decisions are based on who needs the job the most

The third rule has significant implications given the fact that gainful employment is absolutely critical in newcomers' initial settlement in the host society. In contrast, employers' hiring strategies and practices have not fully taken into account who needs the job most, consequently leading to unfair outcome. This is further contested by social inclusion theory by Omidvar and Richmond (2003). One of the dimensions herein is proximity, which is about sharing not just physical but also social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, and to reduce social

Diagram 1: The Mismatch between Hiring Strategies and Job Search Strategies

The way a typical employer prefers to fill a vacancy

1 *From Within:* Promotion of a full-time employee, or promotion of a present part-time employee, or hiring a former consultant for in-house or contract work, or hiring a former 'temp' full-time. Employers' thoughts: *"I want to hire someone whose work I have already seen."* (A low-risk strategy for the employer.)

Implication for job hunters: See if you can get hired at an organization you have chosen—as a temp, contract worker, or consultant—aiming at a full-time position only later (or not at all).

2 *Using Proof:* Hiring an unknown job hunter who brings proof of what he or she can do, with regards to the skills needed.

Implication for job hunters: If you are a programmer, bring a program you have done—with its code; if you are a photographer, bring photos; if you are a counselor, bring a case study with you; etc.

3 *Using A Best Friend or Business Colleague:* Hiring someone whose work a trusted friend of yours has seen (perhaps they worked for him or her).

Implications for job hunters: Find someone who knows the person-who-has-the-power-to-hire at your target organization, who also knows your work and will introduce you two.

4 *Using An Agency They Trust:* This may be a recruiter or search firm the employer has hired; or from a private employment agency—both of which have checked you out, on behalf of the employer.

5 *Using An Ad They Have Placed* (online or in newspapers, etc.).

6 *Using A Resume:* Even if the resume was unsolicited (if the employer is desperate).

The way a typical job hunter prefers to fill a vacancy

Source: Bolles, Richard N., 2004

distances between people.

Today's HR management has transformed from an administrative cost centre to a value-adding strategic business opportunity. However, the narrowly defined social network continues to dominate the access to employment and newcomers' life chances are lost in the name of cost and risk reduction. An integrated and holistic approach guided by the individual organization's business rationale should be introduced fully recognizing newcomers' needs. Targeting ethnic media and establishing partnerships with ethnic communities prove to be quite effective in quickly attracting newcomer job seekers. The imploding of this archaic social reproduction ought to take place. Employers must be mindful, that, in light of the new trends leading the current and future global economy, they are taking a much bigger risk when avoiding the current "risk".

Chapter 4
Technological Usage

Toward the end of the Late Industrial Age, HR increasingly came under pressure to cut costs. In part, this cost-cutting pressure was met by an increasing use of computers not only as record keeping devices, but also as report production devices and to handle compensation, training, skills inventories, and recruitment (Glueck 1978). In the early to mid 1970s, many Human Resource Management (HRM) practices became computerized with the availability of relatively inexpensive mini-computers.

In the Early Silicon Age from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, radical job search strategies and informal networking techniques led to the emergence of bulletin board systems (BBS). These BBS served to provide not only job opportunities but also access to information on company's project development, latest corporate announcements, as well as future career opportunities. BBS was the precursor of the current list-servs, which are now used both by HR professionals and job seekers as ways to collect information and obtain candidate/job leads. However, both BBS and the current list-servs are established on various forms of existent social networks, which require certain recognized social status. It is almost impossible for newcomers to tap into this area.

The restructuring of HR management driven by this cost-cutting pressure continued to interact with new computer technologies. Since 1993, corporate intranets and personal computers (PC) have been widely adopted by organizations. This computer mediated human resource management initially derived from common practice of both HR professionals and job seekers. However, over time, in order to serve the cost-cutting and risk-control purposes in the hiring

practices, technologies in Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) have increasingly

become the proxy to distance the potential job seekers from the employer. Tyrrell (1999) records

that these pressures reached their critical point in the 18 months between January of 1995 and

July of 1996.

From the HR side, the deployment and use of web based recruiting material offered significant

benefits in terms of costs, time, reach, and "formalism" (pp. 10-11). For instance, in 1996, Silicon

Images reported a daily saving of $70,000 on paper costs from recruiting. And the cost of posting

a job ad to Monster board is 5 percent of posting the same ad to a major newspaper (Tyrrell

1999: p. 11). However, access to Cyberspace is not governed as much by geography as it is by a

combination of skill, access to equipment, and knowledge of where to look and how to act

(Tyrrell 1999: p. 15). This can pose significant challenges to newcomer job seekers due to their

limited access to the computer as well as knowledge of political, social and economic systems in

Canada and provinces in which they reside.

In the meantime, due to the changes in the labour market structure and intensification of radical

job search strategies, the sheer number of job applicants was growing beyond the capacity of

web-based staffing and recruitment. As a result, newer technologies were introduced into HRIS

to mitigate this situation. One of the representatives is the Optical Character Recognition (OCR)

scanning software, which searches for key words in the applicant's profile to locate the best

possibly fit candidate. In order to enhance efficiency, more rigorous competency requirements

have been put in place to help automate initial cuts on candidates. Keywords are frequently used

to scan out any potentially "unfit" candidates. For example, professional titles such as "P. Eng"

(Professional Engineer) are used to screen out any unqualified applicants. However, for

newcomers of engineer backgrounds, they are required to complete one year of work under another professional engineer's supervision to be able to obtain their P. Eng title in Canada. This catch-22 situation has barred many professional engineers from entry into the occupation. Some newcomers also have difficulties interpreting some culturally-defined attributes such as "sound judgement" in job postings. And they often choose to avoid using these words in their cover letters or resumes, which is the opposite of what they are expected to do. Therefore, newcomer job seekers oftentimes become victims in this process, whose resumes never get delivered in front of the hiring manager. In addition, the past decade has witnessed a variety of new products designed for finding the perfect match in the pool of job applicants, such as Resume Assistant for extracting the job applicant's skills from the resumes, and SkillScape for identifying the candidate's overall competencies. What's more, depending on corporate policies, the job requisition can be instantly forwarded to others via a job posting system as needed such as to staffing professionals at headquarters, recruiters, managers of other business entities, and employees throughout the organization (Walker and Perrin 2001).

Overall, the technological usage in recruitment proves to serve and perpetuate the social practices and hiring strategies of employers. Newcomer job seekers' social status in the larger society is further replicated into their position in the HR cyber space. As human capital has become the last and most competitive advantage in global business, employers ought to realign their hiring preferences and HR technologies, which are currently based on pre-established local networks and professional achievement, with the emerging global skills framework.

Chapter 5

Cultural Barriers

What are the barriers facing employers hiring newcomers?

According to employers, the most cited barriers they face in hiring new immigrants are language barriers, unfamiliarity with foreign credentials and lack of Canadian work experience. This is supported by human capital theory, which recognizes these technical barriers in translating immigrants' human capital in commensurate employment. The CLBC 2002 survey (2003) shows that of those employers who expected to hire new employees, only 18 percent of public sector managers and 28 percent of private sector managers reported no major obstacles were expected. Language difficulties became the biggest obstacle cited by two thirds of managers. And it was followed by difficulties assessing foreign credentials (52 percent) and lack of Canadian experience (46 percent) (pp. 17-18). The Canadian HR Report Survey (2005) came to similar findings on the question: What, if any, challenges do you foresee in bringing a skilled immigrant into your organization? Out of 271 responses from 133 employers, the top three challenges were: 109 (40 percent) identified language issues; 48 (18 percent) stated lack of Canadian experience; and 45 (17 percent) said don't know equivalency of international education credentials (p. 8).

Are these barriers just technical barriers?

In contrast, a 2002 Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) (2002) study of internationally trained professionals arriving after 1994 found that 73.2 percent of them who had had their credentials assessed after immigrating obtained equivalent academic qualifications to those granted by Ontario universities (p. 19). And most participants assessed their language ability good or excellent (pp. 14-17). In the 2005 Canadian HR Reporter Survey,

one employer said that most often new Canadians have trouble communicating verbally and in written form. That poses some concern but our experience is that the learning curve is quite rapid and in a matter of months this is no longer an issue (p. 11). These findings seem to suggest some unspoken underpinnings of these technical obstacles obstructing newcomers' access to employment.

Employers generally assess job seekers' language abilities during the interview process. Harvey (2001) points out that some recruiters did express their concern with the immigrant job seekers' basic ability to comprehend. However, many others expressed concern with accents but it was not clear through the context how that would exactly reduce the person's productivity. And others spoke of the ability to conduct social chat in the workplace. This finding indicates that judgement on language abilities is heavily constructed on prevalent social and cultural norms. The 2005 Canadian HR Reporter survey (2005) recorded that among the 133 responded employers, 123 (92 percent) have received a resume from a skilled immigrant; 112 (84 percent) have ever interviewed a skilled immigrant; 112 (84 percent) have ever hired a skilled immigrant; among these respondents, however, only 62 (52 percent) said it was their first job in Canada (p. 1). The Environics' Survey (2004) demonstrates that about one quarter of Canadian employers would not hire immigrants without Canadian work experience, another one quarter would consider foreign work experience, but do not consider it necessarily equal to Canadian work experience. Only 39 percent of surveyed employers consider work experience from other countries equal to Canadian work experience. In regard to why Canadian work experience is seen as important, 32 percent of employers thought it proves that immigrants are able to work in the Canadian work environment, 14 percent believed it is a demonstration that they are able to meet Canadian standards, and 11 percent said because it lowers the risk of hiring employees who

do not fit into the culture of the organization. It is clear that Canadian experience means more than having worked for a Canadian company; it means knowledge of culture on a broad level as well as of the industry and specific organizations (Harvey 2001: p. 24). This finding indicates that Canadian experience is actually used as a cultural parameter in the evaluation process and equated with proof of required language and communication skills and ability to function in the Canadian business culture. Similarly, it has been discovered that Canadian credentials are also valued as easy proof of the applicant's soft skills and whether they can fit into the new workplace. All the above findings underscore a persistent theme in the hiring process, which is that language abilities, Canadian credentials and work experience serve as the key indicators of not just technical skills but more importantly communication skills and adaptability into the Canadian workplace culture. And the rationale behind is that "being culturally fit" implies "being immediately productive". This can create a systemic barrier to entrance into the labour market as Canadian work experience, accent requirements and culture-specific communication skills often place unreasonable expectations on immigrants. As a requirement, the term 'Canadian experience' is a retroactive condition placed on newcomers, impossible to fulfil without first being part of the workforce (The Public Policy Forum 2004: p. 27).

Labour market reciprocity systems

Tyrrell (1995) contextualizes labour market as reciprocity systems and market exchange systems centred around both socio-cultural resources, e.g. roles, values, ideologies, obligations, etc. and more formally economic resources including land, labour, skill based commodities. In this resource distribution system, employment occurs when a set of reciprocal obligations are exchanged between the employer and the employee. Therefore, a job is not solely an economic relationship in the formalist sense of the term, but rather a social relationship. Consistently, in the

hiring process it is normally not enough for an applicant to have necessary technical skills for the job, but they must possess culturally oriented social skills with the right organizational ideology and attitudes. So the recruitment process reflects these dual search criteria, both skills and cultural fit, in accordance with politically and socially constructed limits (Tyrrell 1995: p. 4). In fact, the cultural fit model is so resilient that it is noted that even in situations where a position is purchased from an organization, e.g. franchising, the social selection criteria for the organization are in still in place, while the skills criteria may not be (Tyrrell 1995: p. 4).

This consensus is reflected in a variety of testing systems developed by employers. Many standardized skills testing undertaken by employers, particularly large employers in the public sector, often is not necessarily related to the skills for the job, demands language skills that are not required in the position, or culturally biased (The Public Policy Forum 2004). Meanwhile, newcomers need to trade their technical skills for commensurate employment so that they can start to get familiar with the Canadian culture and values through their work environment. However, following the deficit model, employers expect newcomers to unlearn things that are obvious to them and relearn things that make sense in the Canadian context as a reciprocal condition for employment. Stemming from the conceptual gap, many employers are unable to see the transformation in the global economy or even if they are, they are unwilling to make changes from within. Instead of better understanding the cultural context of the emerging workforce, they appear to be reluctant to step out of their traditional cultural framework and change the status quo. This leads to the divergence between a high level of cultural expectations from employers in their terms and a low level of cultural orientation for newcomers in their initial settlement stage, which becomes an impediment in newcomers' access to employment.

What's more, culture-specific testing may be also problematic in that it neglects cultural

differences among racial subgroups. Studies have been done in the United States to repeatedly

observe racial differences in cognitive ability measures in an employment setting. They found

that for example African Americans score about 0.75 to 1 Standard Deviations (*SD*s) lower than

Caucasians, and Hispanic Americans score approximately 0.75 *SD*s lower than Caucasians.

Asians usually score higher than Whites on quantitative measures and lower on verbal measures

(Ployhart, Schneider and Schmitt 2006: p. 416). These mean differences can translate into

substantial differences in hiring rates across groups and produce adverse impact against minority

applicants. Similar studies substantiated by data collected on the basis of race have yet to be

conducted in Canada. Given the fact that recent immigrants to Canada are predominantly from

racial minority groups, such hiring measures may have a significant impact on them. In the

meantime, I am also mindful of any potential consequences of such studies, the topic of which is

beyond the scope of this paper.

These findings also suggest that the economic and labour market integration of newcomers

cannot be seen in isolation from their social and cultural integration. Attention also needs to be

drawn to distinguish between different cultural norms. In fact, the definition of culture discussed

in this context is twofold: societal culture and corporate or organizational culture. Societal

culture refers to a set of rules commonly accepted by members of a society that dominate their

thinking, behaviours and social relationships. In spite of the changing demographics of Canadian

society, some mainstream cultural norms continue to prevail and appear resilient to new ideas.

Corporate or organizational culture, on the other hand, is interpreted by small cliques in power

who enforce and reinforce dominant values within their organizations. It represents some of the

core values of the mainstream society and is dominated by what people oftentimes call "old boys

club". In a 1996 Harvard Business Review article titled 'Building Your Company's Vision', researchers Jim Collins and Jerry Porras presented a model of corporate vision. They describe core values, a key component of corporate vision, as "…the essential values and enduring tenets of an organization. A small set of timeless guiding principles. Core values require no external justification; they have *intrinsic* value and importance to those inside the organization". The Conference Board of Canada provides another concise definition of organizational culture:

> Organizational culture includes the written and unwritten rules that both shape and reflect how an organization operates. It is the way in which decisions are made, conflicts are resolved and goals are achieved. Organizational culture is, in short, "the way things are done around here." (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 53)

Changes in labour market social relationships

Tyrrell (1999) thoroughly examines the change in the labour market social relationship for the past two centuries. A notable trend during this period is that individuals have tended to define themselves by their employment situation and status (p. 1). As several other researchers point out, an individual's job has provided not only much of their self image, but also access to many of the resources that allow them to define themselves as part of a community and, hence, part of a distinct culture (Trice 1993; Trice and Beyer 1992; Bridges 1994). At the same time, the departure of organizations from communities took place and corporatism was formulated. In this process, the bond that exists between job seekers and their local communities are not valued any more. Social bond connected by cultural norms becomes paramount and workplace becomes the most important environment for people including new immigrants to interact with one another and integrate into the larger society. It also becomes an essential place for fostering one's identity. However, for most newcomers, the bond with local communities is their only access to social and

employment resources. Limited orientation and access to mainstream societal and corporate cultures force them to retreat into ethnic economies, which are still largely structured on the basis of these ethnic communities.

Also due to this social change, characteristic organizational cultures have been produced based on a specific social contract through which loyalty to and conformity with the values of the organization are exchanged in return for security (Bennet 1990; Grossman 1988; Kalleberge, Knoke and Marsden 1995; Morin 1991; Tyrrell 1994; Whyte 1956). These changes in the very nature of organizational bonds, especially communicative bonds, have led both employers and employees to accusations of betrayal, and to changes in the *de facto* social contract (Tyrrell 1999, p. 2). Simultaneously, recruitment activities have increasingly become a power struggle between who does the hiring and who needs to be hired. One example of this is the current trend in the hiring process that recruiters always expect candidates to know more about their companies. This form of invisible social contract that regulates the trading between conformity with the organizational cultures and employment security is ubiquitous, particularly notable in certain professionals as well as high-profile positions.

In his journal article "It's Tough to Find New Footholds in Journalism", George Abraham (2005) describes his early encounters of setting foot in the doors of journalism in Canada and how shocked he is to see the little interest employers have shown in what he did before he came to Canada. Journalism has been defined as a cultural rather than an intellectual industry under global trade rules. He argues that Canadian journalists see themselves as part of the national effort to maintain Canadian sovereignty against American hegemony, which perhaps makes it difficult for them to see how somebody from another part of the world could possibly wave their

flag as effectively as someone who spent a lifetime absorbing what this battle for identity is all about (p. 98). Celebrated Canadian writer and editorialist Haroon Siddiqui believes that Canadian newsrooms do not offer a level playing field for immigrant journalist. He says that journalism has become the "least movable feast" in Canada because of hurdles posed by bilateral treaties with the United States and Mexico. He also blames media corporatism, which has resulted in cutbacks that allow for very little movement of journalists across borders (Abraham 2005: p. 99). Siddiqui further points out that what editors are looking for in journalists is a "mental library" – the history of Canada and modern Canadian politics, its culture of entertainment and sport, and its long-standing public policy debates – subjects that provide necessary context for any kind of news coverage (Abraham 2005: p. 99). So Canadian newspapers continue to look at events through local eyes to please the lowest common denominator (Abraham 2005: p. 99) instead of valuing cross-cultural communication to reflect the transformation in the larger society. In this process, newcomer job seekers, whose cultural orientation makes it impossible for them to make immediate contribution to fit into the narrow definition of the Canadian culture are subsequently excluded. The Environics' Survey (2004) also found similar results in some other professions such as law or architecture, where there is a perception that knowledge of Canadian laws, building codes, etc… can only come with Canadian experience (p. 24).

Such culture-laden social contract becomes even more stringent when it comes to trading for high-profile positions that entail higher social status and employment security. People fit for senior level positions are sought after by employers in many industries. However, the technical bar and particularly the cultural bar for entry are elevated at the same time. It is stressed by employers that the right workplace fit is considered crucial for senior level positions. Other than

the extensive technical skills required, soft skills such as communication, project management, and teamwork are noted as very important for upper level positions (Harvey 2001: p. 13). Once again, the emphasis is on the candidate's exposure to the Canadian business culture, which is equated with a demonstrated ability of commanding extensive interface with clients, internal staff and other social networks that are essential to the business. The one-year executive MBA Program at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Business is particularly designed to instruct newcomers to Canada with executive backgrounds how to take on a senior management position under the North American model. Reportedly, the course material stresses team collaboration not necessarily taught elsewhere. Many of these newcomers have impressive work experience in their home countries. However, due to perceived lack of communication skills and cultural and business knowledge gaps, they are often advised to apply for lower-level positions. Many of them are then considered overqualified and denied access to these jobs or if hired suffer from chronic underemployment.

Hiring process: one-way street communication

These performance predictors such as organizational fit and personal suitability are subjective and normative, envisioned and interpreted solely by employers, who uphold their corporate values in making the hiring decision. Therefore, this one-way street communication formula in the employer-employee power dynamic validates all the evaluation biases in the hiring process. People in hiring positions may unconsciously look for someone who mirrors his or her own experience, personality, education, and particularly ethnocultural background, which is called "cloning effect" (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 37). For the same reason, management-driven succession planning as a common practice may be problematic in that it duplicates only what the incumbent deems appropriate.

In fact, quite a number of qualitative and quantitative data has been collected to demonstrate how employers eliminate people of different cultural backgrounds in their hiring practices. For example, many immigrant job seekers feel that employers always single out their resumes in the screening process because of their ethnic names. No studies have been conducted in Canada. But some research in the United States found that resumes with "white" names, such as Brendan, Gregg, Emily and Anne were 50 per cent more likely to generate responses than were identical resumes with African-American names, such as Tamika, Aisha, Rasheed and Tyrone (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 87). What's more, many immigrant job seekers, particularly newcomers, find it challenging to present their resumes in Canadian ways. They complain that employers often focus too much of their attention on the resume style than the real content. Accent is another frequently cited barrier faced by immigrants. Some believe that phone interviews are used to deliberately sift out immigrant job seekers.

This tendency to foster cultural sameness is most visible in the job interview, which is used as one of the important assessment tools measuring a variety of constructs. In this process, suitability check comes down to whether the candidate fits the profile preconceived by the interviewer. Newcomer job seekers, particularly visible minorities, often find it difficult to build a good rapport with the interviewer due to their different cultural programming. Nova Scotia Barristers' Society published an Interviewing Guide (2006) detailing three types of cultural misinterpretations or pitfalls in the job interview process (Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7). These comparisons illustrate how, due to true or imagined cultural differences in communication and decorum, immigrant particularly newcomer job seekers may be misunderstood and misinterpreted in the job interview process. And this one-way communication approach can further lead to cultural stereotyping based on perceived physical attributes and behaviours.

Table 5: Cultural Misinterpretations in the Job Interview (1)

Response Styles

Categories	Candidate's Behaviours	Interviewer's Perception
Self-Promotion	Candidates from cultures that value humility may downplay their accomplishments, deny compliments and feel uncomfortable talking about themselves	Such candidates may give the interviewer a poor impression of themselves and their skills in comparison with mainstream North Americans, who are generally more comfortable talking about their achievements
Silence	Candidates may prefer to pause and think before speaking	Candidates may be seen as slow to respond, at least from a North American perspective, where thinking while speaking can be used to cover up uncomfortable silences. Interviewers may cut off the candidate before they have had a chance to respond
Directness	Candidates from cultures that are less direct may initially respond indirectly to questions, leaving the more direct answer to the end	Interviewers may take the initial part of the answer as the response and interrupt the candidate before the answer is complete or may ignore the latter part of the answer
Minimal Answer	Candidates may respond only to the questions asked and not elaborate or volunteer information until further specific questions are asked	The candidate may appear suspicious, disinterested or unconcerned, and may give a poor impression of his or her skills and experience

Source: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2006

Table 6: Cultural Misinterpretations in the Job Interview (2)

Language Styles

Categories	Candidate's Behaviours	Interviewer's Perception
Stress/Intonation	Candidates who do not have English or French as their first language may have stress and intonation patterns that reflect their native languages	Candidates may be inaccurately perceived as pushy, blaming or impolite
Vocabulary	Candidates may also have usage patterns that reflect their native languages. For instance, courtesy phrases such as "please" or "thank you," so common in Canada, may not be used because there may be no equivalent in their first language	Candidates may be inaccurately perceived as pushy, blaming, impolite, or even uneducated

Source: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2006

Table 7: Cultural Misinterpretations in the Job Interview (3)

Non-Verbal Differences

Categories	Candidate's Behaviours	Interviewer's Perception
Eye Contact	Candidates from cultures that avoid prolonged and direct eye contact with figures of authority (such as the interviewer) do so as a sign of respect	Candidates may be inaccurately perceived as hiding something or not being trustworthy
Handshakes and Head Movements	Cultures differ in how handshakes and head movements are used to support communication. Latin Americans may shake hands softly and pump only once or twice. Individuals of Indian origin may be saying "Yes." Or "I understand you and am listening." when they shake their head from side to side	The interviewer may mistrust the applicant or assume a lack of confidence

Source: Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, 2006

Interestingly, a close examination of these culture-based behaviours that are deemed as confidence and sincerity shows that they are actually not necessarily linked to potential job success directly. In other words, hiring practices are corporate behaviours, but not necessarily corporate interests. What is left out in this process is the objective and merit-based judgement of a candidate's quality.

Equal treatment versus equitable treatment

Such analyses also contest the so-called "equal treatment" as a common practice in general recruitment and human resources management. Data shows that equal treatment based on a narrow definition of societal and corporate cultures is not the same as equitable treatment, and thus does not yield equitable outcome. Many immigrant job seekers refer to the "sticky floor" that limits their opportunities for initial advancement and the "glass (or cement) ceiling" that stops them from attaining top positions in organizations (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and

Mallette 2005: p. 87). This testifies that traditional hiring practices are a product of recruiting relatively homogeneous workforce in the past. Therefore, we must first challenge the very definition differentiating *us* from *them* and recognize the importance of difference and diversity. Social inclusion theory (Omidvar and Richmond 2003) goes one step further: it calls for a validation of diversity as well as a recognition of the commonality of lived experiences. So it is not just about eliminating boundaries or barriers, but about closing physical, social and cultural distances separating people arbitrarily. Two critical dimensions, or cornerstones, of social inclusion theory can be applied to guide possible changes in public policies and support as well as corporate strategies. The first dimension is valued recognition, which is to confer recognition and respect on individuals and groups, and also in this case not to pathologize different cultures and equate them with deficit. The second dimension is human development, meaning nurturing the talents, skills, capacities and choices of individuals to live a valuable life and contribute their worth. Following this paradigm, employers must be involved to get equipped with cross-cultural communication competencies to reach hiring equity as well as global competitiveness. A successful example comes from RBC Financial Group. They not only make mentoring arrangements and English business language classes available to new employees, but more importantly, have developed cross-cultural awareness training for their recruitment and human resource professionals, the first of its kind in Canada. However, creating a diverse and inclusive corporate culture is challenging and needs fundamental changes in people's mindsets. Employers must purposefully cultivate a new structure of corporate culture, find a niche for inclusion in their values and drive diversity strategy into the heart of the structure. Such elaboration also draws attention to possible public policy support in providing cultural awareness training to employers.

Conclusion

This research is dedicated to a close examination of the access to employment issue through the lens of employers. Through exploring four different dimensions: conceptual gap, social practices and hiring strategies, technological usage, and cultural barriers, it intends to draw attention to employers' attitudes and practices behind the scene and the rationales therein. This descriptive study discloses the interconnectedness of employers' behaviours in different stages of the hiring process and how newcomer job seekers are disadvantaged and excluded in this tight-knitted hiring web.

All the findings point to the fact that there is limited policy and program support available to prepare employers for integrating newcomers into the workplace. Partially it is attributable to the general suspicion around government intervention with respect to economic development. However, this research supports the statement outlined in some previous studies that the access to employment issue is not just an economic issue, but also an equity issue. As interpreted by Supreme Court of Canada:

> Work is one of the most fundamental aspects in a person's life, providing an individual with a means of financial support and, as importantly, a contributory role in society. A person's employment is an essential component of his or her sense of identity, self worth and emotional well-being " (Supreme Court of Canada)

Particularly in a knowledge economy, the future prosperity of a nation depends on the quality and engagement of its people (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 1). Therefore, a new conceptual orientation must be fostered under the guidance of social inclusion theory. It requires that both employers and newcomer job seekers share their common

experiences and identify their mutual obligations and benefits. The participation of employers in this process is essential to its success.

Government policy support, as opposed to government policy intervention, is instrumental in providing employers with necessary tools to understand newcomers' lived experiences, their cultural backgrounds and their employment needs. The current policies and programs targeting employers are largely around just promoting the idea of hiring more recent immigrants, instead of also promoting the idea of strategically recruiting recent immigrants effectively. An appreciation and cultural intelligence must be cultivated among employers based on a broader understanding of the issue. This study also makes an attempt to deconstruct some prevalent social norms and sheds light on possible incremental measures that aim at building an equitable process and outcome in the labour market.

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