A WIN-WIN SCENARIO: AN EMPLOYER CASE STUDY OF THE BIDIRECTIONAL BENEFITS OF NEWCOMER-SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

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Employers can play a key role in the employment, settlement, and integration of newcomers. Potential supplemental policies and supports, such as lunchtime EAL training, mentor programs, and housing assistance, can help support newcomer employees. However, before employers invest in such programs they need reassurance that doing so will have a positive impact on their bottom line. Little research has been conducted to assess the potential benefits to both employers and newcomer employees for offering supplemental newcomer supportive policies. This paper reviews the success story of one large Canadian employer by describing the policies offered and the organizational rewards of doing so.

In today's economy, businesses have to look farther than their own backyards to fill vacancies within their organizations. The highly competitive international hunt for key talent and scarce skills is referred to as the *war for talent* (Pollack, 2012). Demographic factors such as the declining domestic birth-rates, the aging population, and retiring baby boomers contribute to the scarcity of workers and key trades. As a result, nations and individual organizations have two options to maintain national economic growth and competitive advantage. First, they can build the capacity of their own citizens to meet demand (Deloitte, 2012). This is a long-term solution, since skills needed by 2020 should be in development now. The second and more immediate option is to facilitate the recruitment of skilled workers from around the world (i.e., temporary foreign workers (TFW), provincial nominees) (Deloitte, 2012).

In Canada, the recruitment of foreign workers and international immigration will become more common as the population ages. For example, the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia (BC) has projected by 2020 there will be one million job vacancies in BC and "international migration will contribute the large majority of BC's net labour force supply" (Pollack, 2012, p. 2). Across Canada, there will be a large increase in the arrival and employment of newcomers. However, there is a concern that these newcomers will be viewed as an economic commodity and not properly supported. Ideally, recruitment is just the first step and is followed by an investment in newcomer integration into both the organization and community. It is essential that employers bringing newcomers to Canada take a leadership role in the integration of their employees. Post-arrival support from employers is crucial (Pollack, 2012), however, the business case for providing supplemental programs has not been made. Therefore, this paper explores one organization that offers supplemental policies to support newcomer employees and reviews the costs and benefits of these programs from both the employer and newcomer perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though the research exploring the bidirectional benefits of organizational newcomer-supportive policies is limited (Guo & Ariss, 2015), it is clear that both newcomers and employees benefit from such programs (van der Heijden et al., 2009; Harvey, 2012; Wang et al., 2005). Starting at the recruitment phase, there is evidence that proficiency with host-country language facilitates settlement and integration (Ashton, Pettigrew, & Galastanou, 2015; Wang et al. 2005), which reduces onboarding costs. During the recruitment process employers highlight the benefits of working for their organization, coming to Canada, and potentially provide incentives. Research suggests, at the very least, employers need to follow through on pre-arrival promises to maintain the satisfaction of their employees (Harvey, 2012).

Research shows that an increase in employee support decreases the turnover intentions of employees (van der Heijden et al., 2009), which can mitigate the significant costs of turnover for the employer. In addition, Wang and colleagues (2005) found that newcomers' adjustment to work and the organization was linked to coworker support and included both fellow newcomer and Canadian- born coworkers. In contrast, newcomers' work satisfaction was linked only to the support of management (Wang et al., 2005). These findings indicate that although coworkers can help newcomers understand their jobs; it is managerial support that helps them like their jobs, which is linked directly to retention. Finally, employers must acknowledge that employees are also members of families. The successful settlement of newcomer employees is reliant on the successful adjustment and acclimation of the employees' families as well (Wang et al., 2005). Therefore, whenever possible organizations should support family reunification and extend integration supports to both employees and their families.

As mentioned earlier, research in this area is limited and has been primarily focused on identifying the challenges newcomers face, rather than identifying and proposing organizational solutions or strategies for better supporting their newcomer employees (Gui & Ariss, 2015). This research aims to identify best practices in newcomer support, by reviewing the experiences of one organization that has been extremely successful in doing so.

CASE STUDY

This research utilized the case study method by exploring the experiences of one organization that has developed exemplary policies in supporting newcomer employees. A large multi-national manufacturing organization was interviewed in February of 2015. This organization, located in the Canadian prairies, employs roughly 1,800 employees in more than 20 locations and estimates their annual sales at $200 billion dollars.

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY OF NEWCOMER EMPLOYMENT

This organization has been employing newcomers, mainly TFW, for over ten years. The organization began foreign recruitment out of necessity and was precipitated by an extreme shortage of skilled trades in Canada. This organization recruits solely skilled trades, such as fitters, machinists, welders, and fabricators. Over the last ten years, the organization has recruited over 300 TFWs and currently employs 60 to 70 TFWs. Impressively, 99 percent of all TFWs recruited became permanent Canadian residents and are still employed by the organization. The few TFWs who returned to their country of origin did so because they or their spouses were unable to get permanent residence due to personal history or health reasons.

Initially, the organization recruited from Ukraine and Ireland, but in recent years recruitment has been almost entirely from the Philippines. Interestingly, the organization finds recruitment often occurs via a snowball effect. For example, they recruit an employee from a specific town in the Philippines and then in subsequent recruitment waves recruit this employee's family members or friends. These family members enter the recruitment process with a strong understanding of what to expect from the organization and Canada, but also benefit from social support upon arrival.

STRATEGIC NEWCOMER RECRUITMENT

The organization uses a strategic and hands on approach to international recruitment. Instead of employing a consultant or intermediary, they have a human resources (HR) professional on staff who focuses exclusively on international recruitment and support of TFWs. This HR professional and managers personally travel to the Philippines to conduct interviews and assess potential employees' language skills, adaptability, and desire for long-term commitment, which are all important to successful recruitment (Guo & Ariss, 2015; McNulty et al., 2009). By personally interviewing potential employees managers customize recruitment and can match specific employees with certain managers, roles, or branches of the organization. On the last trip the organization conducted 250 interviews and hired 70 people. This proactive and personal approach to recruitment increases likelihood of fit for both the organization and employee, can help shape employees' expectations, and can prevent underemployment

(McNulty et al., 2009).

NEWCOMER SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

Upon arrival, the organization provides a number of supports and services, which support the transition and integration of new TFWs. First, the organization provides temporary, furnished housing for three months. After this initial period, the employees are provided with a financial advance, which will cover the deposit and first months rent for accommodation of their own choosing. They provide the housing advance instead of housing, because they have found employees want to pick their own roommates and may have different standards for acceptable living conditions (i.e., number of people per residence, cost). The advance is paid back over several years of employment. Second, the employer regularly holds an employee clothing drives to provide much needed winter clothing for new arrivals.

Third, the organization provides orientation programs that familiarized the TFWs with Canada, the community, the company, and their job. Orientation to the community includes training regarding Canadian culture, safety, available resources, a tour of the community, navigating public transit, getting a bank account, and attaining a health card and driver's licenses. Some organizations do not provide orientation to the community and instead simply refer TWFs to settlement service providers. Orientation to the organization involves an HR orientation, review of organizational culture, and training specifically relating to their role. Fourth, the TFW is paired with a supervisor or mentor to support them through the transition, which research indicates promotes successful integration (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). Fifth, new TFWs are also evaluated for training and skill upgrading opportunities. Newcomers often have to upgrade their skills to work on the latest, modern equipment, which they may not have had access to in their country of origin.

Finally, the organization's in-house legal department aids TFWs with their applications for permanent residence. They encourage TFWs to initiate the process as soon as possible (i.e., six months after arrival), since the process can take two to three years and family reunification is hinged on this step. TFWs receive a $2,000 advance to aid in the expense of applications and family reunification, which is paid back over several years. The organization understands that the sooner families are reunited the happier the employees are being in Canada. Again, this support is rare among employers and certainly endears employees to their employer, leading to long-term commitment (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010).

When international recruitment began, the organization did offer English language classes to their Ukrainian TFWs, but uptake was low. The organization now solely recruits from the Philippines, because of the strong English language skills. TFWs who need additional supports for English language training or other services are referred to local settlement service providers.

There is risk involved for the employer, since providing newcomer-supportive policies does not guarantee TFWs' commitment to the organization or that they will qualify for permanent residence. However, the organization feels supporting TFWs has led to an extremely high retention rate and a strong competitive advantage.

OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

The organization interviewed believes there are compelling reasons to support TFWs through supplemental programs. These programs are not government mandated, are considered supplemental, and are financially supported by the organization. This organization was desperate to fill skilled trades vacancies in order to meet production targets and fill orders. In light of this persistent skill shortage and the significant investment of time and money into recruitment, this organization is invested in retention. They believe that providing these supports and services has lowered turnover, improved employee satisfaction, and facilitated employee integration. Employee engagement and retention helps the organization avoid the expense of recruitment, retraining, and minimizes downtime while new employees get up to speed.

In addition, the company values the diversity of experience and perspective that TFWs bring to the table. This was an unexpected benefit of international recruitment for the organization. Bringing in those with different perspectives means that TFWs see manufacturing techniques and processes with fresh eyes and, in several cases, have offered beneficial improvements. Safety is often a concern, but bringing in TFWs has not impacted the organization's safety record. In fact, the organization's safety record has actually improved over the last ten years.

NEWCOMER BENEFITS

TFWs benefit from supplemental policies offered by their employer and, as a result, experience a smoother transition to their jobs and Canada. This employer's TFWs receive assistance upon arrival, mentoring, skill development opportunities, financial assistance with housing, access to legal support, and help with permanent residence applications and family reunification. The company is not required to provide any of these supports, but they feel strongly that supporting their TFWs is the right thing to do. The employees, in turn, feel supported and a reciprocal commitment is developed between the employer and TFW that makes for happy employees and lower turnover intentions (van de Hejden et al., 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Canadian employers will be turning to international recruitment in greater numbers to fill labour shortages in the future. Organizations recruiting internationally have an opportunity and a responsibility to, in partnership with government, support the settlement and integration of their employees. This case study indicates that funds invested in supplemental newcomer-supportive policies are a sound organizational investment and can increase their competitive advantage (Zikic, 2015). Organizations can improve the odds of success by personally recruiting employees, ensuring English language proficiency, and supporting newcomers' integration into not only the organization, but also the community. This research suggests that the costs of providing these programs are returned in employee loyalty, employee satisfaction, and productivity, which bolsters the organization's bottom line and competitive advantage.

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