

INTRODUCTION

Canada depends on skilled immigrants for its economic well-being. In the last ten years, over 60% of the individuals who immigrated to Canada have been economic immigrants (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2012). However, the market integration of highly qualified immigrants has not been as full or as rapid as it was in the past, as evidenced by unemployment (Statistics Canada, 2011) and underemployment (Li, Gervais, & Duval, 2006). To address these issues and assist immigrants in bridging to employment in Canada, Career Edge, a non-profit organization based in Toronto, arranges paid internships for internationally qualified professionals (and Canadian graduates). These paid internships have been shown to be effective in improving employment prospects, yet it is not clear what specific factors contribute to this success.

Objectives

- Identify the specific factors that may contribute to the success of Career Edge internships for internationally qualified professionals
- Determine how these factors differentially predict internship and job success
- Explore the role of intern characteristics in internship experiences and job success

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

- An online survey of alumni of the Career Bridge program – a program designed specifically for internationally qualified professionals – who had participated within the last 10 years
- The response rate was 13.8%

Respondents

- 278 internationally qualified professionals (66% males; ranging from 27 to 67 years)
- All born outside of Canada, with the top 5 source countries being India, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and Philippines
- Immigration categories: 71% principal applicants in the skilled worker or professional category, 15% dependents in the skilled worker or professional category, and 11% family class immigrants
- 99% had obtained a post-secondary degree outside of Canada
- 65% did not have prior Canadian work experience
- 95% held at least one job since completion of the internships

Instruments

The survey included blocks assessing: demographic characteristics of respondents, characteristics and perceptions of the Career Edge internship, positions held after the internship, interest in staying connected with Career Edge, and life in Canada.

For further information please contact Rui Zhang,
rzhang3@yorku.ca

RESULTS

Specific factors that contribute to internship success

- Respondents rated 25 possible characteristics of the internship on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*).
- These characteristics fell into one of four major categories.

Aspects of Program Effectiveness – Sample Items

Professional benefits

The learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities available to you during your internship.

The opportunity to learn new skills.

The endorsement of your qualifications from a Canadian employer.

The networking opportunities you gained through your internship.

The opportunity to gain meaningful work experience within your area of expertise.

Socio-psychological benefits

The opportunity to learn how to behave informally with colleagues in the workplace.

Increased career confidence.

Improved knowledge of how your profession works in Canada.

Better adjustment to the Canadian work environment.

The feeling of being welcomed in Canada.

Connections with host organization

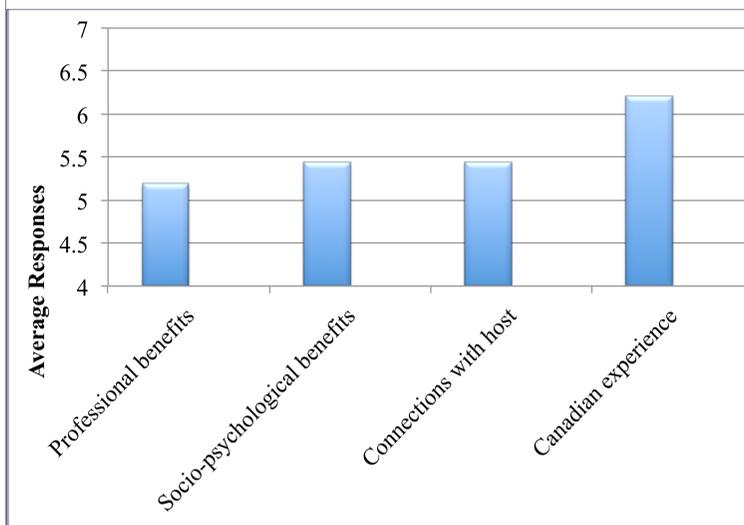
The potential for obtaining full time employment with the host employer.

Your host organization's acknowledgement that they value a workforce that includes internationally qualified professionals.

The opportunity to demonstrate that the skills or educational credentials that you acquired outside of Canada are applicable to the Canadian labour market.

Canadian experience

The opportunity to gain Canadian experience.



How these factors predict internship and job success

- Respondents indicated their evaluations of different aspects of their internship and current job (if applicable) on 7-point scales
- Internship success
 - All four factors were significantly associated with overall and specific evaluations of the internship.
 - Professional benefits, connections with host organization, and Canadian experience were the most important predictors of perceived program success.

- Connections with host organization and, to a lesser extent, socio-psychological benefits were most important in predicting the perception that the internship translated into a desired job.
- Job success
 - All four aspects were substantially associated with evaluations of the current job.
 - Professional benefits and, to a lesser extent, connections with host organization were the most important predictors of satisfaction with various aspects of the current job.
 - Connections with host organization and Canadian experience were the most important in predicting the perception that the internship contributed to obtaining the current job.

The role of intern characteristics

- Gender
 - No gender differences in perceptions of internship effectiveness, or internship and current job evaluations.
- Language proficiency
 - Recall of English proficiency at the beginning of the internship did not predict internship and current job evaluations.
 - Respondents reported generally high English proficiency
- Age at the time of internship
 - Those who were older at the time of the internship generally evaluated their internship experiences and current job less positively.
- Those without prior Canadian work experience
 - evaluated their internship experiences more positively
 - were more likely to attribute the attainment of their current job to the internship

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- We identified four factors that contributed to the effectiveness of Career Edge internships: professional benefits, socio-psychological benefits, connections with host organization, and Canadian experience.
- These factors proved helpful in predicting not only evaluations of internship effectiveness but also current job satisfaction. Thus, opportunities for professional skills, local experience, and social capital seem particularly important to what and how much internationally qualified professionals will achieve from their internship experience.
- The influence of some factors may extend beyond the immediate professional context. We also found that socio-psychological benefits contributed to an overall sense of belonging to Canada and life satisfaction among our respondents.
- We found age and prior Canadian work experience influenced internship experiences.
- To be effective, internship services targeting skilled immigrants should maximize the four aspects of effectiveness identified here, and consider the role of intern characteristics.