

# **Perspectives of B.C. Co-operative Education employers regarding hiring students from international pathways: Early Findings of a multi- institutional study**

A Project of the ACE-BC Research Group:

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# Session Overview

- \* Introductions: Study collaborators
- \* Study Purpose and Research Question
- \* Study Methodology
- \* Sample Concourse Statements
- \* Sorting Process
- \* Analysis & Interpretations
- \* So What...?
- \* Conclusion

# Study Purpose and Research Question

- \* There are increasing numbers of students coming to study at PSE from non-domestic pathways (international students, immigrants, and refugees). In this study we refer to them as **SFIP** (Students from International Pathways).
- \* Many of these students seek local work integrated learning experiences through programs such as co-operative education.
- \* Research and practice has shown that many SFIP struggle significantly in order to obtain, and in some cases progress in, work experiences.
- \* Co-op practitioners report that preparation of these students is complex and time consuming, and job search success rates are often lower.

# Study Purpose and Research Question (cont'd)

- \* BC institutions have a commitment to growing the number of SFIPs and Canadian immigration projections indicate that PSE institutions should expect increasing numbers of students from international pathways in the years ahead.
- \* Many international students (almost 50% at SFU) indicate a desire to immigrate and need domestic work experience in order to do so.
- \* Little is known about employers' perspectives regarding the hiring of these students, making it challenging to prepare students well for the Canadian workplace and/or assist employers in welcoming these students to their workplaces.

# Study Purpose and Research Question (cont'd)

Because of this, the ACE research committee decided to learn more about co-op employers' perceptions regarding hiring this group of students.

Research Question:

**What are employer perceptions and practices regarding the hiring of students that come to BC post-secondary via international educational pathways?**

# Study Methodology

- \* The researchers selected **Q Methodology**, a qualitative approach that is effective at investigating individual and group perspectives related to a given subject.
- \* Q allows for “understanding the interpretive subjectivity of respondents that is not possible through traditional, positivist methodologies.”
- \* This method allows for *new* perspectives and insights to emerge from the response data versus the response data merely representing patterns of responses to *a priori* perspectives presented by the researchers.

# How Does Q Work?

- \* **Research Question** is identified
- \* **Concourse** (the Q sample) is determined (38 statements)
- \* Study **participants** (the P sample) are identified (29 employers)
- \* **Sort** format is decided (in this case, a f2f sort using 9 point Likert scale)
- \* **Data Collection**
- \* **Analysis and Interpretation**

# Developing Our Concourse

- \* The **concourse** represents “the array of ideas, attitudes, feelings, values and perceptions” that are known about the research topic.
- \* We engaged in an **extensive literature review** and a half day **brainstorming session** to generate all we could about what people are saying and thinking about the topic.
- \* The concourse was then reduced to a series of statements which were then **reviewed and refined** to reduce ambiguity and redundancy and ensure voice, tone, and representation.
- \* This resulted in the development of a **38 statement concourse**.



# Developing Our Concourse

Concourse statements were clustered for our purposes in **7** major categories:

- \* **Labour market related statements**
- \* **Education related statements**
- \* **Hiring related statements**
- \* **Language skills related statements**
- \* **Workplace culture related statements**
- \* **Capabilities related statements, and**
- \* **Workplace reputation and effectiveness statements**

# Sample Concourse Statements

## **Labour Market:**

- \* International students take jobs away from Canadian students.
- \* SFIP will not be long term employees as they return home when their visas expire.

## **Education:**

- \* SFIP bring additional knowledge to our workplace.
- \* I don't worry about the student's nationality. I hire from schools that have a good reputation for our workplace.

## **Hiring:**

- \* SFIP have difficulty transitioning to the workplace because cultural differences require a lot of resources.

# Sample Concourse Statements

## Language Skills:

- \* Fluency in more than one language is an asset to our workplace.
- \* Language barriers can create problems in our workplace.
- \* I need employees with strong written English skills to ensure professional communications.

## Workplace Culture:

- \* Males from some cultural backgrounds have trouble respecting women in authority in the workplace.
- \* Hiring employees from different cultural backgrounds enhances our workplace.
- \* SFIP don't understand the norms of a Canadian workplace.

# Sample Concourse Statements

## Capabilities:

- \* SFIP are eager to please because they want to stay in Canada.
- \* Canadian students come from privilege and have a sense of entitlement.
- \* Students from other cultures don't understand or accept feedback when I give it to them.

## Workplace Reputation and Effectiveness:

- \* SFIP help our organization meet our diversity goals.
- \* Our customers want to be served by people like themselves.

# The Sorting Process

- \* Participants **rank and sort** the 38 statements from -4 (strongly disagree) through to +4 (strongly agree).
- \* Key to this process is that it is a “**forced sort**” procedure, whereby the numbers that may be ranked under any one ordinal is limited, so as to result in a bell curve of responses.
- \* This forced sorting requires the participant to not only respond to the statement itself , but also elicits deeper values and beliefs as each statement must then be considered with respect to all the other statements.
- \* Through this relative ranking of statements, participants give deeper meaning and it is this meaning that defines the resultant factors.

# How Does Q Work: What Happens Next?

- \* The raw sorts are entered into the **PQ Method** software.
- \* Ranked statements are subjected to **Factor Analysis**.
- \* The resulting Factors represent distinct “segments of subjectivity” or perspectives regarding the research question. These are often referred to as “world views.”
- \* The Factors are **analyzed and interpreted** by the research team.
- \* **Q methodology does not aim to describe a population or to generalize, but suggests that on any given subject, only a finite number of perspectives exist.**

# The Resultant Factors

This study resulted in **four distinct factors** which represent four different “worldviews” or perspectives regarding the hiring of students from international pathways:

1. **Qualifications are Key and Diversity is a REAL Asset**
2. **International Pathway Students are Difficult and Just *not* a Good Fit**
3. **Hire Those Most Likely to Succeed, Eh?**
4. **Philosophically Committed to Diversity; Behaviourally Committed to Canadians**

# Factor One: Qualifications are Key; Diversity is even Better

## Initial Interpretations:

- \* This world view is most supportive of the value SFIPs bring to their workplaces and is also the most supportive regarding the hiring of International pathway students.
- \* Qualifications, regardless of where earned, are cited as the most important hiring factor.
- \* This view does not give preferential treatment based on being Canadian and all things being equal, may hire a SFIP over a Canadian due to the diverse linguistic and cultural attributes they can bring to the workplace.



# Factor Two: SFIP are Difficult and NOT a Good Fit

## Initial Interpretations:

- \* This factor sees the hiring of SFIPs quite differently – they are viewed as being challenging to manage and support, and in the end, just not a good fit for their workplaces.
- \* This view focuses on the cultural transition problems, and characterizes SFIPs as resistant to understanding and accepting feedback. It holds the strongest views that this is especially true for “males of certain cultures when dealing with females in authority in their workplaces”.
- \* This view holds that SFIPs “take jobs away” from Canadian students.

# Factor Three: Hire those Most Likely to Succeed, Eh?

## Initial Interpretations:

- \* May be described as the most patriotic world view as it clearly favours hiring Canadians.
- \* This view focuses on hiring the student that is most likely to succeed – qualifications and “fit” being key. And in that context, Canadians are the preferred candidates.
- \* It strongly rates conceptual ideas such as “fluency in more than one language being an asset” but does not see that fluency being brought to the workplace by SFIPs.
- \* Neither does it see SFIPs taking jobs from Canadians, again likely because they are seen as less qualified and a poorer “fit,” therefore less likely to succeed.

# Factor Four: Philosophically Committed to Diversity; Behaviourally Committed to Canadians

## Initial Interpretations:

- \* High commitment to hiring relevant experience and credentials regardless of where they are earned and to not paying attention to a student's nationality BUT
- \* Equally high commitment to preferring Canadian work experience, people staying in Canada for the long term, and to hiring Canadians in order to give them an advantage.
- \* Very strong sense that English oral and written language competency is a key hiring differentiator (and likely the rationale that employers from this group will account for preferring Canadians).
- \* These seemingly contradictory beliefs/practices are explained by suggesting that English language competency issues and the challenges assessing foreign experience preclude these employers from hiring equally from the SFIP pool of students.

# Four Factors: Conclusions

- \* There are multiple strong employer views expressed on this topic.
- \* One believes that qualifications, regardless of where they were earned, are key and very much value SFIP.
- \* A second view is quite opposite and see SFIP as problematic and poor fits in their workplaces.
- \* A third perspective is that one should hire for success and SFIP are not the most likely to succeed because the cultural transition is too challenging.
- \* The fourth worldview reflects an intellectual commitment to the notion of diversity but a behavioural commitment to hiring Canadians because it is what they know and there are less language and cultural transition issues.

# So what?

What are the implications for:

- \* Employers
- \* Government
- \* Practitioners and Institutions
- \* Students

# So what...Employers

- \* Training to better understand the various pathways international students take to get to our institutions
- \* Intercultural effectiveness training and strategies to enable SFIP students' adaptation to the workplace
- \* Appreciation of the world view (skills, knowledge, and attributes) and adaptability our SFIP students have
- \* Appreciation of how to make use of that world view and adaptability in the workplace
- \* Training on how SFIP students can gain work permits and permanent residency
- \* There seems to be a latent nationalism (i.e., employers preferring to hire Canadians or wanting to give Canadian's an advantage)

# So what...Government

- \* Additional funding support to enable institutions to provide extra training for SFIP students:
  - \* English as an additional language
  - \* Intercultural communication/effectiveness
- \* Incentives for employers hiring SFIP students as there is the perception that hiring international student is not cost effective
- \* Permit international students to qualify for research grants (CHIR/NSERC)
- \* Allow for the hiring of SFIP into federal government departments
- \* Smoother transitions to permanent labour force: Visas, PNP, Permanent Residency, etc.

# So what...Practitioners and Institutions

- \* Everyone needs intercultural effectiveness training... include as part of institutional internationalization efforts
- \* Development of intercultural effectiveness training for employers and students
- \* Training in how students get work permits and permanent residency
- \* Training in how to showcase SFIP students' world view, experience and adaptability
- \* Collaborate with international student groups at your own institution
- \* Collaborate with other institutions for a regional approach



# So what...Students

- \* SFIP students need intercultural effectiveness training and support to enable their adaptation to Canadian workplaces
- \* Canadian students need intercultural effectiveness training to strengthen interactions with SFIP students (on-campus and on work terms)
- \* Solutions require the engagement of Canadian and SFIP students...together...
- \* SFIP students needs additional training on how to make their unique skills, knowledge, and attributes evident to employers and how to be strategic in their selection of employers
- \* SFIP students planning to stay in Canada need to engage in their communities (on and off campus) to demonstrate an interest and commitment to a future in Canada

# THANK YOU!

For more information on this study, please contact:

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