



2016 EMPLOYER FORUM
FINAL REPORT

Unlock Bias, Leverage Global Talent
March 2016



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"What do we miss if we only hear some of the voices?"

-Laraine Kaminsky, Global Diversity Strategist, President and CEO of Global LK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THIS IS THE QUESTION THAT EMPLOYERS MUST NOW ASK THEMSELVES.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, British Columbia (BC) loses out on as much as \$4.7 billion in economic activity and \$616 million in provincial tax revenues annually because too few residents have the education and skills necessary to help businesses innovate and grow. Combine this with a relatively low birth rate and an aging population and it is clear why Canadian businesses continue to experience mismatches, and skills and labour gaps.¹

More than ever, successfully finding, hiring and retaining immigrant talent has become a critical strategy for BC employers; however, much of the immigrant talent coming to BC is being under-utilized. Although skilled immigrants can make a significant contribution to BC's economic prosperity, many are chronically underemployed at a considerable cost to the economy.

BC employers need to understand how to incorporate effective practices to successfully hire and integrate immigrants into their workplaces. The 2016 IEC-BC Employer Forum: *Unlock Bias, Leverage Global Talent*, held on February 16, 2016 in Vancouver, was an opportunity to provide employers with practical tools and information to help them compete for and retain immigrant talent.

With an audience composed of HR professionals and hiring managers from over 35 BC businesses, the keynote speaker explored how employers can identify and address unconscious biases that hinder the employment cycle. Following the keynote, a panel of representatives from TELUS, Ampco Manufacturers, and BioTalent Canada shared their experiences and practices in hiring and retaining immigrant talent. The day closed with an overview of the IEC-BC Tools and Resources Library, and included an interactive question and answer period designed to determine how IEC-BC can continue to meet employer needs.

The following key themes emerged throughout the day:

1. Immigrant talent is critical to economic growth and employer success;
2. Employers must understand the value of investing in skilled immigrant talent; and
3. Unconscious biases lead to missed workplace opportunities.

Unlock Bias, Leverage Global Talent addressed these themes and provided employers with concrete tools and resources to assist them to remain competitive in a global economy.

¹ [IEC-BC Mind the Gap 2014 Summit Final Report: The Road Forward](#)

"The best leaders challenge the status quo and seek out the visionary thinking and broad perspectives... There has never been a better time to drive this change; never has it been so urgently necessary."

Gordon Nixon, President and CEO, Royal Bank of Canada

CONTEXT

Canada has been known throughout the world as a welcoming destination for immigrants. Many employers already know that immigrants make significant contributions to innovation. A Conference Board of Canada report concluded that at every level, individual, organizational, national and global, immigrants were associated with increased innovation in Canada.² A recent Vancity report identified that immigrants tend to be highly entrepreneurial and are about 30% more likely to start a business than non-immigrants.

Leaders in the business community know that diverse teams are not only an important component of the innovation cycle, but are becoming a necessity in an increasingly global environment. Yet, immigrants continue to face obstacles that limit their ability to maximize their contribution as innovators. These include undervaluing of international experience and education, failure of employers to tap foreign language skills that could be employed in international markets, and a lack of opportunities for newcomers to fully utilize their skills.

Employers may lack the tools and knowledge to create inclusive workplaces and there may be unconscious biases obstructing the immigrant employment cycle. Acclaimed Harvard University Professor, Dr. Mahzarin R. Banaji revealed an uncomfortable truth about unconscious biases at a 2013 leadership event held by Ernst & Young and Royal Bank of Canada: even leaders with the best intentions may harvest unconscious beliefs that counteract the successful integration of workplace diversity.

Banaji's research has shown that one's intent can be an unreliable factor in determining the outcome, and she asserts that this disconnect lies largely in the unconscious mind. What this means is that that implicit biases are not typically known to an individual.

Findings in a report titled *Why do some employers prefer to interview Matthew, but not Samir?* show this to be the case in many hiring situations. For example, it was determined that resumes with English-sounding names were 35% more likely to receive call-backs than resumes with Indian or Chinese origin names. To further illustrate this bias, when an applicant changed their name to an *English-sounding* one, their call-back rate became 40% higher than applicants whose names remained Indian or Chinese in origin.³

Even well-meaning employers are missing out on valuable talent as a result of unconscious bias-based assumptions. Employers must evaluate their current practices, which includes uncovering and overcoming unconscious biases, to successfully compete for all talent, including immigrants.

² [Immigrants as Innovators: Boosting Canada's Global Competitiveness, Conference Board of Canada \(2010\)](#)

³ [Why do some employers prefer to interview Matthew, but not Samir? Oreopoulos and Dechief \(2011\)](#)

“We must competitively court skilled immigrants who now, more than ever, are being sought by competitor countries...”

Liberal Party of Canada to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2015 election campaign

KEY FORUM THEMES

1

Immigrant talent is critical to economic growth and employer success

With a burgeoning tech sector, a number of unprecedented capital infrastructure projects, and its geographical proximity to Asian markets, BC is leading Canada in GDP growth. However, to continue to grow, BC employers will need the right talent at the right time.

According to Statistics Canada, by 2031, BC’s population will grow primarily as a result of immigration, and a third of Canadians will belong to a visible minority.

However, BC is at risk of losing its economic and competitive advantage in the increasing global competition for talent. A continued focus on “Canadian experience,” lack of recognition of international education and experience and other biases about immigrants, will result in missed employment and innovation opportunities, and will impede the growth potential of BC’s economy.

2

Employers must understand the value of investing in skilled immigrant talent

Employers who have been successful in leveraging immigrant talent have done so because they regarded inclusion as a business imperative. Many have changed their hiring practices because they recognized the value of different perspectives above maintaining the status quo. In doing so, they implemented programs and policies that have been highly beneficial to their businesses, enlisting executive level support while finding champions on the local level.

Too often it is a requirement that applicants have “Canadian experience.” Employers must reevaluate their thinking and move away from this paradigm, recognizing the value skilled immigrants bring to an organization.

Immigrants come to Canada with unique perspectives and an eagerness to become a part of the labour market. They often bring advanced skills, world class education, global experience and connections and an understanding of different cultural contexts.

However, regardless of skill level, occupation, or years of experience, new immigrants are likely to have some differences that will require adjustment such as a lack of understanding of the Canadian work place context. Implementing programs and policies that allow skilled immigrants to thrive can be as simple as a culturally competent on-boarding program or job shadowing. However, investing in immigrant talent and creating inclusive workplaces results in a significant return on investment for companies, in terms of increased innovation, productivity and retention.

3

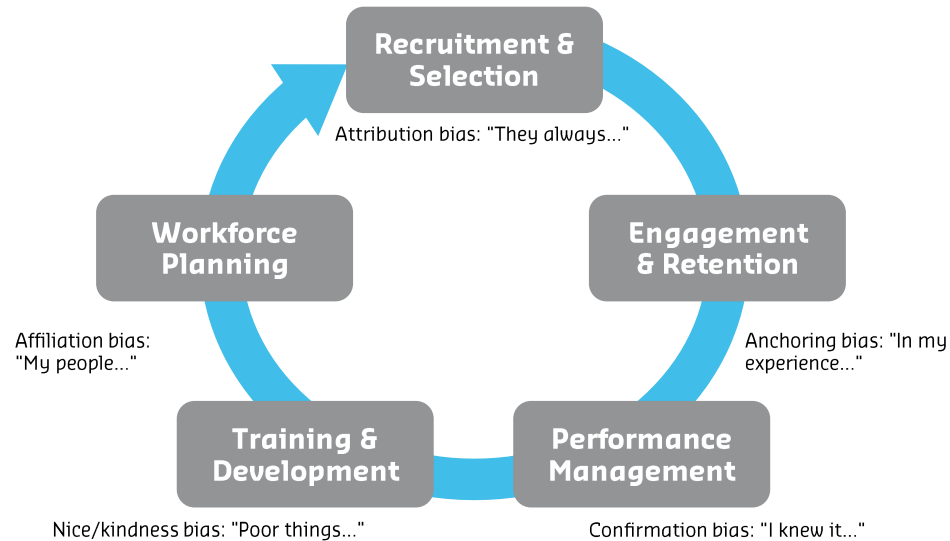
Unconscious biases lead to missed workplace opportunities

Research shows that the human brain is exposed to as many as eleven million pieces of information at any given time, but can only functionally deal with forty at one time. Our judgments and decisions are

frequently based on limited facts and our personal experiences. In other words, our own frames of reference, all play a role.

The [*Implicit Association Test, Project Implicit*](#), developed by Harvard University, is a measure within social psychology designed to detect the strength of a person's automatic association between mental representations of objects (concepts) and attributes (e.g. good or bad). An analysis of one's test reveals implicit biases that the individual may hold that could materialize day-to-day in a workplace setting.

The fact is, employers may be actively working for inclusive workplaces while unconsciously undermining those very initiatives. Biases can permeate every stage in the employment cycle.



Unconscious biases give certain individuals and groups an unearned advantage or privilege, and other groups an unearned disadvantage. Addressing our biases directly to leverage global talent takes persistence and courage. Employers must develop the competencies to disrupt biases and not be complicit in imposing systematic barriers.

"Economic needs should become an even larger factor in the selection of immigrants"

Centre of the Study of Living Standards, 2015.

DAY-IN-BRIEF SPEAKER SUMMARIES

WELCOME

Christian Codrington, Moderator

BC's labour force is expected to grow by almost one million people in less than ten years, and new Canadians will play a crucial role in this increase. In light of this, we must consider if BC is using this talent pool effectively to grow our businesses? Have conversations about the need to integrate skilled immigrants become more redundant than useful?

Employers must step forward and take action to overcome the biases around hiring skilled immigrant talent.

OPENING REMARKS

Fiona Macfarlane, IEC-BC Board Member,
Managing Partner, BC, Chief Inclusiveness Officer, Ernst & Young

Fiona Macfarlane's message was loud and clear, *the successful integration of skilled newcomers into the BC labour force is critical to the success of BC employers*. Global demographic shifts are changing the way businesses manage global talent. Like it or not, in today's global economic landscape, business leaders are beginning to recognize the importance of diversified teams to their bottom line and are competing for immigrant talent on a global scale. The focus on "Canadian experience", combined with other biases employers may harbour, not only cost employers their competitive edge, but it can cost them the opportunity to be innovators in their field.



Is 'silence' your response to "What do we do to #unlockhiringbias?"

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Laraine Kaminsky, Global Diversity Strategist and Speaker

"What do we miss, if we only hear some of the voices?" asked Laraine Kaminsky, as she prepared participants for the journey aimed to raise awareness around unconscious biases and build the competencies necessary to overcome them. "What contribution could these voices make to those around the table in your organization?"

Unconscious biases can cause us to lend certain individuals or groups an unearned advantage or disadvantage. For example, the number of female musicians admitted to the orchestra after the implementation of blind auditions in the 1970s, rose from 5% to 25%.

There are also a lot of codes in the workplace, and every organization and company has them. We need to break these codes, and understand that many are used to exclude those, who are different, from the workplace. "A candidate is not a good fit, he/she is overqualified, he/she does not have an executive presence and is too quiet." All these codes often prevent us from seeing how important the diversity of personality types in the workplace is, and how essential it is for our employees to reflect the diversity.

Cultural agility is critical. One of the big changes in the Canadian demographic profile is the origin of immigrants.

Being an inclusive employer requires:

- **Empowerment** – help teams excel by creating the supports needed to thrive;
- **Accountability** – demonstrate confidence in direct reports to do the best job;
- **Courage** – be an ally and an advocate; and
- **Humility** – learn from others, listen to varying perspectives, and admit mistakes.

These ideas were explored further during a dynamic Q&A session. Questions included the business case for inclusion, challenges in the workplace, and biases harboured by immigrant groups themselves.

Although the first immigrants came to Canada from Western Europe, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, now the vast majority of arrivals are increasingly from China, India, the Philippines, and Pakistan. According to Kaminsky, these are relationship-based cultures, in which self-promotion is not common. She urged Forum participants to consider these differences when screening candidates. Re-thinking questions for job interviews, checking one's assumptions about 'fit' and looking for new ways to assess foreign credentials are just some of the ways of doing this.

Ms. Kaminsky told a personal story about overcoming her own bias. In need of a skilled facilitator, she received a recommendation for an outstanding candidate, who happened to be blind and was living with cancer. Despite her own background in diversity coaching, it took Ms. Kaminsky just a second to screen him out mentally because of his disability. When she made a conscious decision to overcome her initial reaction, she discovered a highly skilled facilitator highly regarded by her clients.

"We need to be intentional about creating diversity on our team," Kaminsky noted. True engagement results in an increased bottom line.



"What's the cost of not doing it?"

Ron Sun, General Manager, Ampco
Manufacturers

"It's about starting small."

Cindy Laporte,
People and Culture Manager, TELUS

PANEL DISCUSSION: HIRING PRACTICES THAT WORK

Participants:

Cindy Laporte, People and Culture Manager, TELUS

Ron Sun, General Manager, Ampco Manufacturers

Stephen Zrudlo, Business Development and Partnerships, BioTalent Canada

A diverse panel representing medium to large sized employers, as well as an industry association, provided insight into the policies and practices that their respective organizations have implemented to hire, integrate and retain skilled immigrants.

After providing a critical lens to their organizations, they realized that their workforce and leadership did not reflect the diversity of their customer bases. They recognized that they would have to think outside the box to become an employer of choice for new Canadians, which included shifting organizational policies and practices to:

- ➔ Actively work to match the organization's workforce to its customers. Employers who match the diversity of their staff to that of their markets may be better positioned to meet their client's needs.
- ➔ Hire immigrants at every level of the organization, including in leadership roles. Employees tend to be more dedicated to an organization, and motivated in their work, if they see that the organization is committed to their advancement.
- ➔ Provide encouragement for immigrant employees to share their views. Managers who actively invite feedback from immigrant employees reap the benefits of hearing diverse points of view, which is essential for innovation.
- ➔ Invest in immigrant employees as there is a clear return on the investment.

Employers can implement easy, yet effective strategies to increase their ability to hire, integrate and retain immigrant talent effectively.

Some of the strategies implemented by the panel organizations included:

- ↳ Revising job descriptions to make them more inclusive.
- ↳ Moving away from requiring applicants to have “Canadian experience.”
- ↳ Reach out to immigrant talent communities.
- ↳ Posting jobs in uncommon places – one of the employers posted jobs in a local church, which had a large immigrant congregation.
- ↳ Implement a ‘mentoring/buddy’ program.
- ↳ Offer workplace language training.

Collectively the panel agreed that employers must be aware of their biases and be able to differentiate between critical skills and those skills that can be learned on the job. Panelists urged delegates to consider an organization’s long-term requirements when hiring employees, and to critically reflect on the changes that they must make in order to succeed in hiring skilled immigrant talent.

CASE STUDY: AMPCO MANUFACTURERS

#unlockhiringbias think diversity of thought and experience.

Having realized that its sales and customer-service departments were too homogenous, Ampco Manufacturers saw this as a business opportunity. They made a commitment to change their hiring practices which would better reflect its customer base. By identifying the critical skills needed within the company, they began to focus on what new Canadians could bring to the team, rather than on their perceived deficits. They invested in the development of their immigrant employees including:

- Sponsoring internationally trained accountants become Chartered Professional Accountants.
- Providing English-language training for immigrant employees.
- Offering training to help Canadian-born staff better communicate to diverse colleagues.

Furthermore, as an example of Ampco’s success in implementing immigrant integration practices, Ampco assigned a dedicated manager to edit process documentation that had been produced by foreign born colleagues, and within a few years, these same staff members were in a position to approve company processes.

Investing in their immigrant employees has and continues to reap financial and human capital benefits for Ampco.

TOOLS TO LEVERAGE GLOBAL TALENT

Opreet Kang, Manager, Global Connections, IEC-BC

Hanif Ladha, Manager, Employer Relations, IEC-BC

Opreet Kang and Hanif Ladha provided an overview of IEC-BC's Tools and Resources Library, an online compilation of resources designed to help employers find, hire and retain skilled immigrant talent.

Prior to the presentation, attendees participated in a poll designed to assist IEC-BC to better understand the current BC employment landscape and some of the challenges faced by employers. The results of the poll were as follows:

- 79% plan to hire new staff in the next three months.
- 84% have used web-based resources as part of their hiring processes.
- 50% find the biggest business challenge is in attracting talent.
- 63% have implemented strategies to attract candidates from a diverse talent pool, including new Canadians.
- 65% noted that their management teams do not currently have the necessary tools and knowledge to create inclusive workplaces to on-board and integrate skilled immigrants.
- 65% noted that they find it challenging to review the resumes of internationally trained candidates.
- 57% would like IEC-BC's help in establishing direct connections with skilled immigrants.



"We have to look beyond our assumptions and beyond our biases, and we have to get colleagues in our workplaces ready to welcome new Canadians."

Kelly Pollack, CEO, IEC-BC

CLOSING REMARKS

Kelly Pollack, CEO, IEC-BC

Ms Pollack reflected on her own learnings from the day's discussions. In her years of working in the field of immigrant integration, she has often heard immigrants framed as having deficits instead of as bringing assets. For her, it's not because new Canadians don't have both deficits and assets, but it's because of our unconscious bias.

The only way to change our biases is "to put the elephants in the room" - that international experience and education is often undervalued, that professional associations and regulators still have barriers in place and that some immigrant groups are biased against other immigrants.

She also noted that many employers are often willing to hire immigrants, but are sometimes challenged to help them integrate into the workplace. And accepting that an immigrant doesn't speak "perfect" English and yet can still add value while they are learning on the job, has been a tough hurdle for many employers to get over.

She noted that employers need to change their immigrant employment practices, by choice or by necessity and called on the Forum delegates to mirror innovative leadership. Developing an inclusive workplace, while not always easy, is absolutely critical to developing and retaining high performing, diverse teams.

"We have to look beyond our assumptions and beyond our biases, and we have to get colleagues in our workplaces ready to welcome new Canadians," she said.

Employers must not be complicit or compliant.

Are you hiring for the future? [#unlockhiringbias](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build the business case for inclusion

- Undergo an internal audit. Look at the ongoing changes inside your organization – such as the aging workforce, or demographic and cultural shifts within your clientele – and act accordingly.
- Gather support. Gain buy-in from the top down by ensuring that hiring managers understand the value of qualified and internationally trained candidates.

2. Recognize the return on investing in immigrant talent

- Think long term. Leveraging global talent is now an opportunity to strengthen your organization for the future.
- Champion skilled individuals. By sponsoring resources like language training or helping an individual receive their professional designation, you are building organizational capacity. And you are fostering increased retention.
- Take advantage of tax incentives. Employers who hire skilled new Canadians may be eligible for tax credits, like the Scientific Research and Experimental Development (SR&ED).

3. Uncover biases

- Acknowledge unconscious biases. While people are hard-wired to prefer similar individuals, employers can build competencies around mitigating the impact of workplace biases. Take the Harvard Implicit Association Test as a first step to uncover biases.
- Think, learn, and act differently. Consciously seek out individuals with different backgrounds, look for opportunities to immerse yourself in different environments, and take deliberate actions to disrupt your “normal” processes.
- Walk toward your bias (and encourage others to do so, too). While we can’t change other people’s attitudes, we can work in our own organizations to create inclusive workplaces and minimize the barriers that immigrants face.
- Do not be complicit or compliant. Flag barriers to inclusion that exist within professional associations and regulating bodies in order to facilitate change.

4. Prepare your organization to hire global talent

- Be culturally agile. Factor in differences when screening immigrant candidates. A behavioural question that works for one group may not work for another.
- Be fair. Establish clearly defined, measurable criteria against which to evaluate all candidates. A structured process can prevent biases.
- Translate qualifications information. Implement a method to assess foreign qualifications and experience into Canadian equivalents. If a new Canadian is your best fit, find a way to give that individual an opportunity.

5. Take steps to successfully integrate global talent

- ↳ Be specific and accountable. It is essential to use clear and relevant performance indicators to measure performance.
- ↳ Reference the facts. Use data to combat myths about integrating skilled immigrants as “not worth the effort.”
- ↳ Combat staff biases. Be aware of biases that some groups may harbour against each other. Use the levers of control that you have to create inclusive workplaces.
- ↳ Access relevant resources. IEC-BC’s Employer Tools and Resources Library can help you [find](#), [hire](#) and [retain](#) skilled immigrant talent.
- ↳ Introduce new Canadians to IEC-BC’s [MentorConnect](#) and [Connector](#) programs. These programs provide excellent opportunities to learn best practices and industry information, build local professional networks, and improve employment prospects.

APPENDIX 1: POST FORUM SURVEY RESULTS

A survey aimed at determining participant satisfaction and comprehension was sent to all participants following the 2016 Employer Forum. The following are the survey questions and aggregate results:

- Have an increased awareness about the immigrant talent pool in BC.
77.94% Agree or Strongly Agree
- Have an increased understanding of unconscious biases, as well as about the strategies that can be used to mitigate this bias during hiring and retention.
86.76% Agree or Strongly Agree
- Am inspired to incorporate immigrant talent into my organizations talent management strategies.
80.56% Agree or Strongly Agree
- Left the Employer Forum with actionable items and practical strategies to more effectively hire and retain immigrant talent.
81.94% Agree or Strongly Agree
- As a result of the Employer Forum, will visit the IEC-BC website and use the Tools and Resources Library as a resource.
86.11% Agree or Strongly Agree
- The presentation on the Tools and Resources Library provided useful information about tools and resources currently available through IEC-BC's website
77.78% Agree or Strongly Agree

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