Correlates of Immigrant Workers' Job Satisfaction

Jon Woodend & Nancy Arthur
University of Calgary

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Abstract

Research in the career development field has primarily focused on the barriers immigrant workers face when integrating into the workforce and how they can overcome these barriers. There have been few studies investigating contextual factors that impede workplace integration. To address this gap, the current study surveyed employed immigrant workers across Canada about their job satisfaction, in relation to their bicultural competence, English language usage, social support, and workplace attitudes. A correlational analysis revealed significant correlations between bicultural competence, English language usage, social support, workplace attitudes and immigrant worker job satisfaction. Results from this study highlighted the importance of considering contextual influences such as workplace attitudes in developing research and practices to support the successful employment integration of immigrant workers.

Keywords: job satisfaction; skilled immigrant workers; workplace attitudes

Government policies in many developed countries have emphasized immigration strategies to enhance their national economies through offsetting a declining birthrate and increasing their global competitiveness (Arthur, 2012). Yet, many barriers exist for internationally educated and experienced immigrants to secure meaningful employment (Chen, 2008; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). Previous research identified three key factors related to immigrants' workplace integration. First, bicultural competence, one of the most adaptive levels of acculturation, occurs when individuals from non-dominant groups develop the ability to successfully negotiate the cultural values and beliefs of their own culture and that of the dominant society (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). Second, English language usage appears to be a key to employment success, as individuals who use English more frequently reported greater capacity to use the appropriate language successfully across settings (e.g., leisure and business; Salamonson, Attwood, Everett, Weaver, & Glew, 2013). Third, social support includes an accessible network of family, friends, and community resources to buffer personal and financial strain when entering the workforce (Koert, Borgen, & Amundson, 2011).

However, an over-emphasis on these three key factors runs the risk of placing the sole responsibility on immigrant workers for mitigating issues related to workforce access and integration while ignoring contextual factors (Wong & Guo, 2011). One important contextual factor is the workplace attitudes that influence immigrant workers' workplace integration. Workplace attitudes include the individual's perceived acceptance or discrimination from coworkers or supervisors/hiring officials, and the individual's perceived advancement opportunities for her/himself or others of his/her ethnic group within the company (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). As such, the current study sought to understand which factors related to job satisfaction, a key determinant of workplace integration, in order to provide guidance as to how best to intervene in supporting immigrant workers' employability (Chen, 2008).

Method

Theoretical Underpinnings

A relevant theory for considering influences on the workplace integration of immigrants is the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), originally proposed by Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1964). One facet of TWA includes the interactions between the skillset of the individual and

the skillset sought after by the employer, and the match between the personal needs of the individual and the incentives provided by the employer (Dawis, 2005). Consequently, the overarching research question explored in the current study follows: What are the significant relationships with immigrant workers' job satisfaction? In this study, there was a demographic questionnaire (e.g., gender, age, country of origin) and a total of five measures used to investigate the above mentioned factors. These measures included (a) the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS; Spector, 1985), (b) the Bicultural Self-Efficacy Scale (BSE; David, Okazaki, & Shaw, 2009), (c) English Language Acculturation Scale (Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2008), (d) the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988), and (e) the Workplace Prejudice/ Discrimination Inventory (WPDI; James, Lovato, & Cropanzano, 1994). We selected these measures due to their strong properties related to validity and reliability.

Participants

To access participants for the study, we googled immigration services centres in Canada and sent invitation emails to eight of them. Personnel from these centers then forwarded the invitation onto their clientele who accessed the survey via a URL contained within the invitation.

Results

There were 96 participants, 66.7% men and 33.3% women. The average age was 34.29 (*SD = 9.65; Min = 21, Max = 61*). Participants reported a wide range of countries of origin, with representation from English-speaking countries (e.g., USA, UK), Asian, Middle Eastern, South American and African countries. Participants also indicated diverse academic backgrounds (i.e., high school, some university, bachelor's and graduate degrees). To discern the relationship between the identified factors and immigrant workers' job satisfaction, bivariate correlational analyses with the five measures were conducted. There were several significant relationships. Specifically, as participants' scores for job satisfaction increased they reported greater capabilities for navigating their heritage and Canadian culture (bicultural competence; $r = .28, p < .001$), increased perceived social support ($r = .25, p < .05$), and decreased levels of discrimination at the workplace ($r = -.62, p < .001$). Interestingly, greater English language use was significantly correlated with greater bicultural competence ($r = .41, p < .001$) but not with any other variable. These results supported previous research that highlighted the role of bicultural competence and social support with job satisfaction but did not support the inclusion of English language usage. Importantly, the findings also added support for the inclusion of workplace

attitudes as an important factor in understanding the relationship with job satisfaction.

Discussion

To interpret these findings, it is important to also consider delimitations of the study. As correlational analyses do not indicate causality among variables, it cannot be determined which of these factors directly impact job satisfaction. That said, there are key implications from this study that inform the work of career development practitioners. It is important to continue to build awareness of the systemic barriers that may be inhibiting immigrant workers' abilities to successfully integrate into the workforce (Chen, 2008). Although it is imperative to help an individual foster a sense of agency, it is also critical to recognize that hard work alone cannot overcome many employment barriers. Instead, it may be the case that practitioners need to advocate for employers to take leadership and some responsibility for the successful integration of immigrant workers (Waight & Madera, 2011). Based on these findings, future research could include a path analysis to determine which factors directly predict job satisfaction. Another avenue for research would be to investigate the practices of employers that successfully help integrate immigrant workers into the workplace. Given these findings, it is timely to increase the focus of factors in the employment context that support immigrants for positive

integration and job satisfaction, rather than solely on their skills and attributes. Together, immigrant workers and employers can create supportive conditions for successful workplace integration.

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Author Note

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Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to Jon Woodend, Educational Psychology, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, AB, T2N 1N4. Email: jdwooden@ucalgary.ca