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The Traits and Skills of Successful Immigrant Workers in American Organizations

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE OPUS COLLEGE OF  
BUSINESS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

By:

Lolita Tuopay

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

April 2023

**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

The Traits and Skills of Successful Immigrant Workers  
In American Organizations

by  
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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents Eva Augusta Huston and David K. Tuopay who were both interested and invested in my education. My father pushed me the hardest and always uttered that a great education is the equilibrium between the rich and the poor. My mother was quieter and shy but engaging, encouraging, and stern. I believe they are still cheering me on and extremely proud of my accomplishment. I am the first in my family to receive a doctorate degree.

I am also dedicating this work to my husband and best friend Alvin Jones who has been supportive from day one. He has encouraged me throughout this journey especially during this dissertation process which has been the most difficult of my doctoral journey. He has never allowed me to doubt myself or believe for one minute that this task was not achievable in spite of our many sacrifices. To my children Andria Nyenkan and Erric Jones: this is a testament that you can do whatever you set your minds on.

Lastly, to my family who has always known me to be a lifelong learner. My sisters-Esther who believes in me more than I do myself and Etmonia. My brother-Alonso, my nieces-MaJassie, Margaretta and CeeCee. My nephews-Malcolm, Montell, Lindwee, and Joel. My grandchildren-Victor, and Edna.

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I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee Dr. Robert Barnett, Dr. David Jamieson, and Dr. Jean Davidson. First, thank you for accepting my request to serve as my dissertation committee members. Thank you for your faith in me, your patience, and guidance. This dissertation would not have been successful without your support. To my dissertation Chair Dr. Barnett who has also become my mentor-thank you very much for your mentorship, constructive feedback, guidance and continued support throughout my doctoral program and this research project. This journey would not have been possible without your support. I'm eternally grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge my remarkable participants who volunteered their precious time to interview with me and share their invaluable experiences.

Lastly, I would like to recognize my editor Stacey Johnson who has stayed up late at night editing my dissertation at the same time being supportive by encouraging me and telling me that it will be all worth it in the end. I am grateful.

## Abstract

There is no clearcut, defined step-by-step process for immigrant workers to follow that guarantees success within American organizations. The existing literature identifies immigrant demographics common to leadership roles but does not point to specific traits or skills immigrants need for promotion to leadership positions or how to navigate the hiring process within U.S. organizations. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research was to identify factors contributing to immigrant workers' success within American organizations. An interview approach was used because the immigrants who have lived these experiences are the most accurate storytellers. The study comprised 15 volunteer participants. Those participants formed two groups: successful Immigrant Workers ( $n = 10$ ) and Hiring Managers ( $n = 5$ ). Through an interview process, data was collected and coded. Data analysis involved the use of process coding (Saldana, 2014) to identify common themes. Both Immigrant workers and Hiring Managers identified seven themes; five of which were common to both groups interviewed: (a) *Personal Traits and Characteristics*, (b) *Interpersonal Skills*, (c) *Achievement Orientation*, (d) *Desire for Learning and Development*, and (e) *Multiculturalism and Diversity*. Immigrant workers also identified *English Proficiency* and *Mentoring and Coaching* as important influences on their success. Hiring Managers noted they considered a variety of *Basic Work Requirements*, and *Knowledge of the U.S.* when hiring or promoting immigrants. Implications and recommendations for immigrant workers are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

In 2021, immigrants to the United States reached 46.2 million accounting for 14.2% of the total U.S. population (Camarota & Zeigler, 2021). Migration to the United States has not been easy for those from non-European countries. Prior to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, immigration and migration policy were based on a system of national-origin quotas. This policy kept immigration almost exclusively open to only northern and western Europeans. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 redirected the focus from country of origin to immigration based on family ties and skilled labor. The intent was to unite families and attract skilled labor to the United States. The implementation of Immigration and Naturalization Act resulted in a nation that is far more multiculturalist. Migration has increased from countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as compared to Europe. Recent data indicates the makeup of the U.S. immigrant population as follows: Asian = 28%; Mexico = 25%, Europe, Canada, and North America = 13%; the Caribbean = 10%; Central and South America = 15%; the Middle East and North Africa = 4%; and Sub-Saharan Africa = 5% (Budiman, 2020).

As the immigrant population has grown, the immigrant workforce has also. Immigrant workers make up a significant segment of the U.S. workforce. The overall share of immigrants in the U.S. labor force has increased sharply from 10% in 1995 to 17.4% in 2019 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Immigrants' interests that have fueled this trend include better opportunities for work, improved living conditions, a

desire to join their American spouses/families, a need to escape their troubled countries, and/or to get the best possible education (Golchin, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most of the literature on immigrant workers describes basic demographic information, analyzes policy issues, explores related concepts (e.g., intercultural competence), is not necessarily specific to the U.S., or addresses the issue of immigrants' traits and skills through a review or re-analysis of other data. There is little direct research relative to specific traits and skills immigrant workers need to succeed in U.S. organizations. In their recent chapter, Bradley-Geist and Schmidtke (2018) concluded “despite increasing immigration worldwide, research on immigrants and immigration is sorely lacking within industrial-organizational psychology and organizational behavior” (p. 168), noting that—with few exceptions—immigrant populations appear to have been forgotten by or invisible to organizational scholars.

In the few studies that that have been conducted, the research tends to focus only on immigrants from a single country, and/or may not investigate traits or skills directly. For example, research conducted on Chinese immigrants was focused on transition experiences and narrowing the achievement gap (Amundson et al., 2011). In a broader study of immigrants from 11 western countries, Lancee and Bol (2017) explored the difficulties experienced because of their background, skills, and education in their home country. They concluded that foreign degrees are “weak” signals to employers that could impede access to occupational success. They also found that immigrants' skills often had limited transferability work in their new country, perhaps restricting an immigrant's job options to lower-level, lower-skill positions. This work did not include a sample of U.S.

immigrants, but some research supports these findings. Analyses conducted by the Pew Research Center (Bennet, 2020) found that immigrant workers were more likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to be employed in low-skill jobs.

Using the Big Five framework, Bhai and Dramski (2018) investigated the role and impact of non-cognitive character skills among first and second-generation immigrants by analyzing data from the National Survey of Midlife Development. Their analyses showed that immigrants had significantly higher levels of *Openness to Experience* and *Agency* than their U.S. counterparts, which in turn explained immigrants' earnings as well as factors such as schooling or education. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2014) provided a well-documented discussion of 28 traits and personality "styles" that should be related to multicultural effectiveness. However, their focus appeared to be on developing an integrated framework or theory of cultural adjustment, more than on identifying specific traits needed by immigrant workers. It should be noted that neither of these publications included direct research conducted by the authors themselves.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was designed to explore the experiences of successful immigrant workers to identify the traits, skills, and other personal characteristics that facilitate job and career success for them in U.S. organizations.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study investigated attributes that foreign-born workers need to be successful in U.S. organizations. The importance of this investigation was to:

- Help fill the gap in the immigrant worker literature by providing a more complete and useful description of the attributes that immigrant workers need than exists at present.
- Help immigrant workers understand requirements for upward mobility within in U.S. organizations.
- Help U.S. organizations understand how to identify and develop high potential foreign-born employees.

### **Research Questions**

The central research question of this study was to uncover and document the personal qualities and attributes (i.e., knowledge, traits, abilities, skills, and other personal characteristics) that immigrant workers need to be successful in U.S. organizations.

Related to this issue are several additional, more specific research questions such as:

- Do the traits and skills outlined in models of “high-potential employees” and various skill taxonomies apply to immigrant workers in the same way they apply to U.S.-born employees, or might immigrant workers need higher quantity and/or quality of the traits and skills than their U.S. counterparts to be seen as high-potential and adequately skilled?
- Do immigrant workers need different or additional skills (compared to their U.S. counterparts) to achieve success and promotion in the workplace?
- How do the traits and skills proposed as critical to effective acculturation (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2014) operate for immigrant workers in relation



to the traits and skills identified as necessary by the high-potential and skill taxonomy literature?

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Immigrant.** An immigrant is a person living in a country other than that of his or her country of birth. Regardless of whether that person has taken the citizenship of the destination country, served in its military, married a native, or has another status—he is considered an international migrant (Bolter, 2019).
- **Foreign-Born Worker.** A person born outside of the United States but currently residing within the country. A foreign-born person is also a person who was not a U.S. citizen at birth and neither parent were U. S. citizens. Those persons include legally admitted immigrants, refugees, temporary residents such as students, temporary workers, and undocumented immigrants (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).
- **Career Success.** The promotion of immigrant employees into managerial or supervisory roles within American organizations.
- **Traits.** An individual's innate characteristics that are largely stable and constant across time and situations.
- **Skills.** A capability that is learned or acquired through education, training, or experience.
- **Competencies.** Sets of skills, traits, knowledge, and behaviors that aid an individual to successfully perform difficult work functions within an organizational work setting.

- **Potential.** A quality or talent that exists in an individual that enables them to be effective in other roles in the future, usually with much broader responsibilities and at higher levels in an organization.
- **Intercultural Competence.** The ability to function successfully in a foreign culture.

### **Limitations**

A total of 15 participants were interviewed for this study using a qualitative approach. The relatively small sample size does not reflect the entire immigrant population, and the study participants were almost entirely from Minnesota alone. This limited the generalizability of the results to a larger population of successful foreign-born workers in the United States. In addition, the data was self-reported. While experiences of the study participants were assumed to be a valid source of data, no objective measures of personality or skill-levels were used, making it difficult to be precise about “how much” of a trait or skill is needed, after the emergence of the various themes from the interviews.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction and a background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, definition of terms, and limitations. Chapter 2 comprises the literature on high potential, competencies models, and the leadership pipeline. The literature reviewed also signifies a gap in what is needed for immigrant workers to be successful in American organizations. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study including the research paradigm, research design, participants and sampling, instruments, research procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 contains the

summaries of all interviews while Chapter 5 delineates the primary and secondary themes. Lastly, Chapter 6 includes the findings, recommendations, summary, and conclusion.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Successful employees in U.S. organizations are often considered as those who achieve career advancement and promotion in the workplace. Models of the “high potential” employee specify the components (e.g., traits, skills, and experiences) that help organizations identify and develop their most promising workers. Other models focus on the skills needed for effective performance, including how the skills required by employees differ from one level to the next in their organizations (Charan et al., 2011). Discussion of select models of employee potential, skills models, and the leadership pipeline as well as literature describing immigrant workers and intercultural competence comprise the literature review.

### **Models of High-Potential Employees**

One of the first comprehensive models of high potential was developed by the Corporate Leadership Council (2005). Their model was developed from survey research on over 11,000 matched pairs of employees and their managers from 59 global organizations. Their sample was drawn primarily from developed countries, but geographically diverse: 93% of the sample included respondents from the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia. The remaining 7% of the sample was comprised of South African, Central and South American, Asian, and Mexican organizations. The analysis of their high-potential management survey led to specification of a 3-part model of the high potential employee:

The Council defines a high-potential employee as someone with the ability, engagement, and aspiration to rise to and succeed in a more senior, more critical

role...Each of these components is in turn made up of several potential subcomponents.

**Ability.** An employee's ability consists of innate characteristics (e.g., an employee's capacity to process complex ideas, to think logically, and to perceive and understand others' emotions) and learned skills (e.g., an employee's technical, functional, or interpersonal skills).

**Aspiration.** Implicit in much of the literature's discussion of potential is the notion of motivation – whether the employee wants or desires the set of responsibilities, challenges, and rewards that succeeding in a more senior, more critical role entails...For the accelerated HIPO career track to be attractive to that employee, he or she must possess some amount of aspiration for the things that come with advancement, such as prestige and recognition, influence within the organization, financial rewards, new work-life balance trade-offs, and overall job enjoyment.

**Engagement.** Employee engagement is the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard employees work, and how long they stay because of that commitment. (Corporate Leadership Council, 2005, p. 4)

The research from the Corporate Leadership Council was compelling, not only for its elaboration of a model and its components, but also because the business benefit (i.e., ROI) was investigated, along with the ways in which “potential” could be practically developed or enhanced. For example, their research found that organizations rich in high potential talent – those where one in five employees was high potential – outperformed

average employees across the organizations in their database by 14% and had a 22% performance edge over organizations where only one in 50 employees was considered high-potential. The report also detailed practical recommendations for organizations who wished to proactively accelerate the potential of their employees by examining the impact of over 300 strategies, programs, or interventions designed to enhance or drive employee potential. Of more than 300 such “drivers,” fewer than 80 had any measurable impact on employees’ potential. The most impactful drivers were clustered into 3 themes: a) relationships at work (including the importance of having a strong manager and regular interaction with high-potential peers); b) a credible organizational commitment to learning, development, and career advancement; and c) creating learning opportunities and new experiences within an employee’s existing job (Corporate Leadership Council, 2005).

Silzer and Church (2009) explored the concept of potential and tried to integrate the many variables and constructs used in the literature and by organizations into a more cohesive model. They located and examined 11 models of potential that had been published or were in use by organizations (including their own survey of 20 companies known to have or use a high-potential model or program) and found 20 variables in several categories. The results of their search and analysis are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Key Themes Across Models of Potential*

---

<p>Cognitive abilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conceptual or strategic thinking, breadth of thinking</li><li>• Intellect, cognitive ability</li><li>• Dealing with complexity/ambiguity</li></ul>	<p>Motivation variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drive, energy, engagement, tenacity</li><li>• Aspiration, drive for advancement, ambition, career drive, organizational commitment</li><li>• Results orientation, risk taking</li></ul>
<p>Personality variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interpersonal skills, sociability</li><li>• Dominance</li><li>• Maturity, stability, resilience</li></ul>	<p>Performance record</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance track record</li><li>• Leadership experiences</li></ul>
<p>Learning variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adaptability, flexibility</li><li>• Learning orientation, interest in learning</li><li>• Openness to feedback</li></ul>	<p>Other variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical/functional skills, business knowledge</li><li>• Qualifiers—mobility, diversity</li><li>• Cultural fit</li></ul>
<p>Leadership skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership capabilities, managing and empowering people</li><li>• Developing others</li><li>• Influencing, inspiring, challenging the status quo, change management</li></ul>	

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*Note:* From “The Pearls and Perils of Identifying Potential” by R. Silzer and A. Church, 2009, *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2(4), p. 400. Copyright 2009 by the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

Silzer and Church (2009) then considered a new approach to organizing the fairly unwieldy “laundry list” of themes and variables they had found and proposed a model of three types of *potential dimensions*: a) Foundational Dimensions, b) Growth Dimensions, and c) Career Dimensions.

**Foundational Dimensions:** Personality Characteristics and Cognitive Capabilities. These dimensions included variables that are stable across situations and

unlikely to change in adulthood such as sociability, assertiveness, self-control, and intellectual abilities and skills.

**Growth Dimensions: Learning and Motivation Skills.** These components were viewed as intervening variables that can aid or inhibit further learning and development. Adaptability, learning orientation, openness, drive, and an individual's achievement orientation are core features of this dimension.

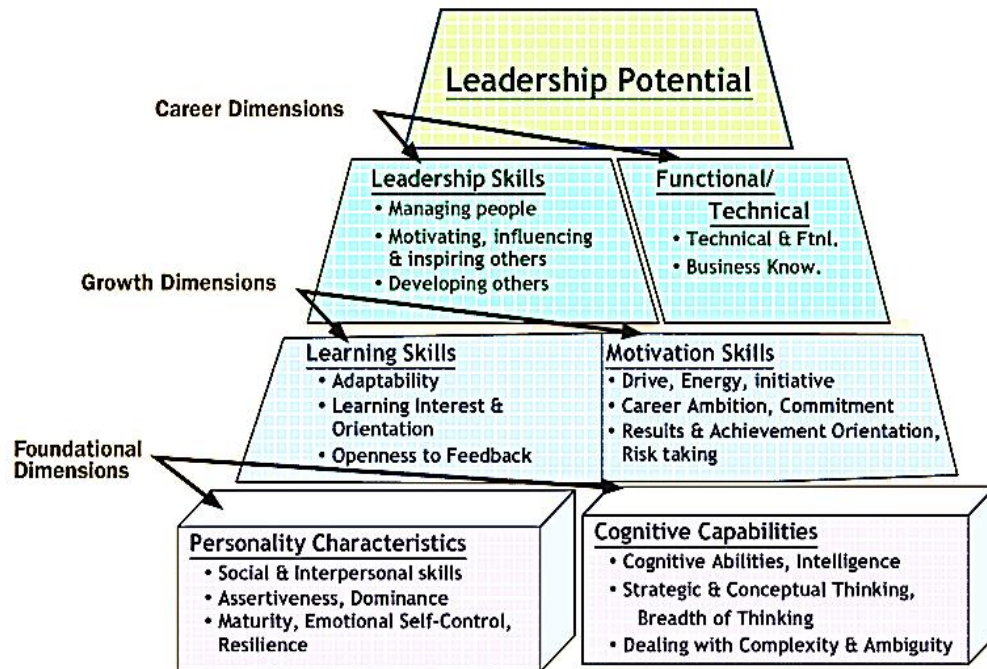
**Career Dimensions: Leadership Skills and Functional Technical Skills.** These were considered early indicators of the capacity to develop skills often required by certain choices an individual makes about their career and are contingent on having some degree of the growth dimensions skills (e.g., an interest or motivation to learn). They are cultivated from and by an individual's experiences, rather than assumed to be largely innate. Silzer and Church's model is shown graphically in Figure 1. It is worth noting that their Foundational and Growth dimensions capture much of what was described by the *Ability* and *Aspiration* components the Corporate Leadership Council's (2005) model, and both are populated mainly by traits.

However, the Silzer/Church model shows that their Career dimensions depend on and are influenced by the factors in the other two dimensions. As an example, an individual with supervisory experience may be able to develop the leadership skills required for a larger organizational leadership role later in their career, provided they have enough of the relevant traits and motivation to pursue such a role. This notion of learning or developing important skills from educational and work experiences was not necessarily explicit in the Corporate Leadership Council model.



**Figure 1**

*The Silzer/Church Blueprint of Leadership Potential*



*Note:* From “Going Behind the Corporate Curtain with a Blue Print for Leadership Potential: An Integrated Framework for Identifying High-Potential Talent” by A. Church and R. Silzer, 2014, *People and Strategy Journal*, 36(4), p. 53. Copyright 2014 by HR People & Strategy.

Church and Silzer (2014) reported that their Blueprint has been adopted as the underlying framework for integrated leadership potential assessment and development efforts at several major corporations such as PepsiCo, Eli Lilly, and Citibank; and has been the topic of several additional scholarly chapters and articles. Silzer and Borman (2017) provided a fairly complete discussion of the research supporting the variables and components in their model. Similarly, the Blueprint was supported by Finkelstein et al. (2018) who framed the model in terms of several predictive hypotheses, including the possible impact on high-potential *designation* from biases residing in the implicit

leadership theories of organizational decision-makers, the dynamics of impression management, and organizational contextual factors. Nonetheless, Finkelstein and her colleagues (2018) asserted that the Blueprint's variables and dimensions of constructs appeared "essential and generalizable across situations" (p. 7).

### **Skills and Competencies Needed for Job Effectiveness**

As described above, models of high potential include a distinct emphasis on the presence or absence of *traits* to describe the high-potential employee. An alternative approach involves a focus on the skills that individuals need to succeed and advance. In contrast to traits, typically assumed to be innate, skills are largely acquired and developed through education and experience. Northouse (2016) cites the work of Katz (1955) as among the earliest skills-oriented models. Katz (1955) described three basic sets of administrative skills needed for success as a leader: technical, human, and conceptual; noting that the importance of human and conceptual skills increase as an individual manager moves from front-line to executive level leadership roles. However, it was not until some 40 years later that an empirically based skills approach began to receive attention in the leadership literature, grounded in the work conducted by Mumford et al. (2000). In research on over 1,800 U.S. Army officers, Mumford and his colleagues proposed a model that recognized the contribution of cognitive and personality traits but featured several sets of leadership competencies needed by individuals to lead effectively. Competencies are considered skill sets of motives, traits, knowledge, and behaviors that differentiate superior from average performance (Spencer et al., 1990). Mumford et al.'s (2000) leadership competencies included problem-solving skills, social judgment skills,

and knowledge skills which they described as a leader’s expertise to organize relevant information to define and solve complex organizational problems.

The identification and validation of the key competencies needed for success in the workplace has received a great deal of attention and a detailed review of the competency literature is beyond the scope of this review. However, the work of Bartram and colleagues is useful to summarize as an illustration. Based on factor analyses and multidimensional scaling analyses of self- and manager ratings of workplace performance, eight key competencies were identified and validated (Bartram et al., 2002; Kurz & Bartram, 2002). Other research had identified sets of competencies that were comprehensive, but long and unwieldy (for example, see Tett et al., 2000, who catalogued 53 separate competencies). Identifying a shorter list of the most important skill sets needed for effective performance provided a generic but substantially more manageable competency framework. A description of the “Great Eight” is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Titles and High-Level Definitions of the Great Eight Competencies*

Factor Competency Domain Title	Competency Domain Definition
Leading and Deciding	Takes control and exercises leadership. Initiates action, gives direction, and takes responsibility.
Supporting and Cooperating	Supports others and shows respect and positive regard for them in social situations. Puts people first, working effectively with individuals and teams, clients, and staff. Behaves consistently with clear personal values that complement those of the organization.
Interacting and Presenting	Communicates and networks effectively. Successfully persuades and influences others. Relates to others in a confident, relaxed manner.

Factor Competency Domain Title	Competency Domain Definition
Analyzing and Interpreting	Shows evidence of clear analytical thinking. Gets to the heart of complex problems and issues. Applies own expertise effectively. Quickly takes on new technology. Communicates well in writing.
Creating and Conceptualizing	Works well in situations requiring openness to new ideas and experiences. Seeks out learning opportunities. Handles situations and problems with innovation and creativity. Thinks broadly and strategically. Supports and drives organizational change.
Organizing and Executing	Plans ahead and works in a systematic and organized way. Follows directions and procedures. Focuses on customer satisfaction and delivers a quality service or product to the agreed standards.
Adapting and Coping	Adapts and responds well to change. Manages pressure effectively and copes well with setbacks.
Enterprising and Performing	Focuses on results and achieving personal work objectives. Works best when work is related closely to results and the impact of personal efforts is obvious. Shows an understanding of business, commerce, and finance. Seeks opportunities for self-development and career advancement.

*Note:* Adapted from “The Great Eight Competencies: A Criterion-Centric Approach to Validation,” by D. Bartram, 2005, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(6), p. 1187. Copyright 2005 by the American Psychological Association.

A thoughtful review of the factors exclusively comprising over 60 years of leadership and management theory and research was provided by Campbell (2013). His analysis of numerous models identified eight factors he “intended to be a distillation of all previous taxonomies, or taxonomic appearing research on the substantive-performance content of leadership and management” (Campbell, 2013, p. 407). His proposed structure of management performance is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Eight Basic Factors Comprising Management Performance*

---

1. *Decision Making, Problem Solving, and Strategic Innovation:* Making sound and timely decisions about major goals and strategies. Includes gathering information from both inside and outside the organization, staying connected to important information sources, forecasting future trends, and formulating strategic and innovative goals to take advantage of them.
  2. *Goal Setting, Planning, Organizing, and Budgeting:* Formulating operative goals; determining how to use personnel and resources (financial, technical, logistical) to accomplish goals; anticipating potential problems; estimating costs.
  3. *Coordination:* Actively coordinating the work of two or more units, or the work of several work groups within a unit. Scheduling operations. Includes negotiating and cooperating with other units.
  4. *Monitoring Unit Effectiveness:* Evaluating progress and effectiveness of units against goals: monitoring costs and resource consumption.
  5. *External Representation:* Representing the organization to those not in the organization (e.g., customers, clients, government agencies, nongovernment organizations, the "public"); maintaining a positive organizational image: serving the community; answering questions and complaints from outside the organization.
  6. *Staffing:* Procuring and providing for the development of human resources. Not one-on-one coaching, training, or guidance; but providing the human resources the organization or unit needs.
  7. *Administration:* Performing day-to-day administrative tasks, keeping accurate records, documenting actions. Analyzing routine information and making information available in a timely manner.
  8. *Commitment and Compliance:* Compliance with the policies, procedures, rules, and regulations of the organization. Full commitment to orders and directives, together with loyal constructive criticism of organizational policies and actions.
- 

*Note:* From "Leadership, the Old, the New, and the Timeless: A Commentary" by J. P. Campbell, in M. Rumsey (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership*, 2013, p, 408.

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A comparison of Tables 2 and 3 shows some similarities. Both sets of competencies include the need for good problem solving and decision-making skills, taking initiative and providing direction, and demonstrating strong interpersonal skills and building effective relationships with others. However, Bartram's "Great Eight" are

largely written in a way that describes effective performance for non-supervisory personnel. In contrast, Campbell's factors clearly show the skills required for managers of people, including highlighting effective performance on tasks such as budgeting, monitoring the performance of others, representing the organization, staffing responsibilities, and complying with and enforcing organizational rules and regulations. Missing from Campbell's list is the notion of adaptability and openness to learning and new experiences, which is explicit in Bartram's competencies and featured as an important separate dimension in the Silzer/Church Blueprint of high potential. This is important to note since the traits and skills involved with adaptability and learning may be especially important for immigrant worker success.

#### **Are Different Skills and Competencies Needed at Different Organizational Levels?**

The literature reviewed thus far has described the traits and skills required for success as those needed by employees at various organizational level. The Silzer/Church (2014) model implies that employees need to continue to learn over the entire course of their career, including acquiring different or more leadership skills as they are promoted. As noted, Campbell's (2013) list of managerial success factors differs from Bartram's (2005) but does not differentiate among levels of management or leadership in an organizational hierarchy. Charan et al. (2011) attempted to clarify this in their work they titled *The Leadership Pipeline*.

Drawing on their consulting and work experience involving executive development and succession planning with several large organizations such as General Electric, CIGNA, Citibank, and others, Charan et al. (2011) observed differences in the attributes and skills required by leaders at different leadership levels. They fashioned

their observations into a framework describing these differences at six levels of an organizational hierarchy, from individual contributor to the C-suite. More importantly, they described leadership “passages” or transitions those leaders must navigate to be successful in a role at the next level up. Briefly, their notion involved acquiring and demonstrating the skills, values, and motives required at the next level while one was seeking or during the transition to a role at a higher rung on the organizational ladder. Their volume resulted in a logical, intuitively appealing, and comprehensive taxonomy of skill requirements for success at increasingly broader, more complex, and more senior roles in organizations. Their first leadership passage is described below as an example of the transition that employees must undergo as they seek promotion and advancement.

***The First Leadership Passage: From Managing Self to Managing Others***

Charan et al. (2011) noted that new (presumably younger) employees typically enter the workforce as individual contributors. Successful performance in an individual contributor role may mean becoming proficient in the technical or professional skills required by one’s work, developing a sense of teamwork and cooperative relationships with others, demonstrating responsibility and reliability, and producing high-quality results. Employees who can accomplish these tasks are likely to be viewed as “promotable” and face the first major leadership passage involving a transition from managing oneself to managing others.

Transition to the first-line manager role involves learning to (and learning to value) getting things done through others rather than on their own. Charan et al. (2011) summarize the skills needed and the challenges of this first passage as:

Planning the work, filling jobs, assigning work, motivating, coaching, and measuring the work of others. First-time managers need to learn how to reallocate their time so that they not only complete their assigned work but also help others perform effectively...They must shift from “doing” work to getting work done through others...Specifically, they need to learn to value managerial work rather than just tolerate it. They must believe that making time for others, planning, coaching and the like are necessary tasks and are their responsibility. (pp. 17-18)

Charan et al.’s (2011) leadership pipeline model details the changes in the skills, motives and values, and use of time required at five additional levels of a hypothetical organizational hierarchy. They proposed that failure to successfully complete a transition would cause an individual’s career to plateau or de-rail, and potentially cause harm to the organization. Their specifications for each passage or transition are thoughtful and extensive, and not discussed here. However, a summary of the essential change involved in each transition is shown in Table 4.

The work of Charan et al. (2011) was based on their experiences and observations. They asserted but provided no empirical evidence for the existence of different requirements at different levels. There has been, however, some research that has supported the notion that skill requires change and differ with the tasks and responsibilities of leaders in increasingly more senior roles.

In a study that pre-dated the publication of Charan et al.’s (2011) *Leadership Pipeline*, Kraut et al. (1989) investigated differences in management roles and activities across different organizational levels and functions. The administered a questionnaire asking a sample of 1,412 managers to rate the importance of 57 managerial tasks to their



jobs. They found that first-line supervisors rated tasks involving managing individual performance and providing working instructions as more important to their jobs compared to ratings from mid-level managers and executives. Middle managers reported that planning and allocating resources, and linking or linking different work groups together were the most important aspect of their jobs, and top executives gave higher importance to tasks involving monitoring the external environment such as developing or maintaining relationships with customers and the business community.

Kaiser and Craig (2005) tested the proposition that the behaviors that predict managerial success vary with organizational level. Multivariate analysis of a 148-item multi-rater feedback instrument (N = 2,175) administered to supervisors, middle managers, and executives revealed several significant differences. Learning and behaviors related to treating others well were found to be most strongly related to success at the supervisor level. Behaviors involving making decisions and taking action to get things done were most strongly related to managerial-level success. Behaviors related to involving, empowering, and relying on other staff; as well as behaviors involving deliberating and following through were most strongly related to successful executive-level performance.

De Meuse et al. (2011) examined both skill and importance ratings from a 360-feedback instrument of 67 competencies in a sample of 1,021 supervisors, managers, and executives. They found that the competencies that gained significant importance from supervisors to middle managers were related primarily to people management skills,

**Table 4***Six Critical Passages from the Leadership Pipeline*

Leadership Passage	Skills Required	Transition/Learning Task
From Managing Self to Managing Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Hiring/staffing</li> <li>• Assigning work</li> <li>• Motivating</li> <li>• Coaching</li> <li>• Evaluating others' performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reallocating time to help others perform - shift from "doing work" to getting work done through others</li> <li>• Learning to value (i.e., like) managerial work</li> </ul>
From Managing Others to Managing Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying people to develop</li> <li>• Provide developmental assignments and support through coaching and feedback</li> <li>• Begin to think more strategically beyond one's function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to identify value-based resistance to managerial work</li> <li>• Re-allocating sufficient time to coaching activities</li> </ul>
From Managing Managers to Function Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skip-level communication-good communication through several organizational layers</li> <li>• Cross-functional thinking and teamwork:</li> <li>• Strategic thinking-blending functional strategy with overall business strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuing work that is outside of one's own experience</li> <li>• Competing for resources based on business needs</li> <li>• Adopting a broad, futuristic, long-term perspective</li> <li>• Understanding how to differentiate from competitors to gain a sustainable advantage</li> </ul>
From Function Manager to Business Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating functions</li> <li>• Managing profitability</li> <li>• Effectively using (and valuing) staff functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting a long-term profitability perspective</li> <li>• Managing the paradox of balancing short- and long-term thinking - reserving time for reflection and analysis</li> </ul>
From Business Manager to Group Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating strategy for capital allocation and deployment</li> <li>• Ability to develop business managers</li> <li>• Proficiency at portfolio strategy</li> <li>• Accurately analyzing core business competencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuing the success of others</li> <li>• Exceptionally broad-gauged, complex, and holistic thinking</li> <li>• Learning to manage the expectations of the investor community</li> </ul>
From Group Manager to Enterprise Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspiring the entire employee population</li> <li>• Assemble and lead a team of high achieving reports</li> <li>• Driving quarterly performance that is in tune with long-term strategy</li> <li>• Ability to manage external constituencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visionary vs. strategic thinking</li> <li>• Global vs. operations perspective</li> <li>• Ability to sense shifts in the external environment and proactively take action</li> <li>• Let go of the pieces and focus on the whole</li> </ul>

Note: Adapted from *The Leadership Pipeline* by R. Charan, S. Drotter, and J. Noel, 2011, Jossey-Bass.

including *Hiring and Staffing, Sizing Up People, Command Skills, Building Effective Teams, Developing Direct Reports and Others, Confronting Direct Reports, and Motivating Others*. In contrast, competencies that increased the most in importance from middle managers to executives reflected business and strategic leadership skills such as *Strategic Agility, Business Acumen, Perspective, Creativity, Managing Vision and Purpose, and Political Savvy*.

De Meuse et al. (2011) then sorted the competencies by the amount of increase in skill ratings that were reported and found results corresponding to changes in importance ratings. The competencies that increased the most in skill ratings from supervisors to middle managers were related to people management, including *Command Skills, Managerial Courage, Delegation, Comfort around Higher Management, Motivating Others, and Confronting Direct Reports*. Those skill ratings that increased the most from managers to executives were related to business and strategic skills, which included *Strategic Agility, Perspective, Managing Vision and Purpose, Creativity, Intellectual Horsepower, Business Acumen, Political Savvy, and Innovation Management*. De Meuse et al. (2011) safely concluded they had demonstrated differences in both the importance and effectiveness of different skills required at different levels of the organizational leadership structure, even though their study focused on three levels rather than the six outlined by Charan et al. (2011).

### **Traits, Skills, and Competencies for Intercultural Effectiveness**

Presumably, immigrant workers—like their U.S. counterparts—need to possess the traits and demonstrate the skills that are related to potential and promotion in the workplace. In addition, due to the challenges of acculturation, and the potential

difficulties arising from stereotyping and discrimination, immigrants may need other traits and skills – or may need to demonstrate more of the traits and skills required for success and promotion than are required of their native-born U.S. co-workers.

Bhai and Dramski (2018) compared the character (i.e., personality) traits of immigrants to U.S. natives using data from the National Survey of Midlife Development conducted in the U.S. on cohorts from 1966, 2006, and 2014 (N = 8,039). The survey included a subset of questions intended to map to the Big Five personality dimensions (*Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism*), and the trait of *Agency* (i.e., assertiveness, forcefulness, dominance). Their analyses showed that immigrants had significantly higher levels of *Openness to Experience* and *Agency* than their U.S. counterparts but found no significant differences on any of the other four variables. Although the personality measure used was not a validated personality inventory per se, the authors speculated that higher levels of the traits of *Openness to Experience* and *Agency* were helpful in aiding immigrants to assimilate to the U.S., most likely including finding some measure of employment satisfaction and success.

Leung et al. (2014) reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on intercultural competence. They noted that the literature was extensive, including over 30 intercultural competence models and more than 300 related constructs. They organized their review into three content domains: (a) intercultural traits, (b) intercultural attitudes, and (c) intercultural capabilities. Javidan et al.'s (2010) model is an example of intercultural capabilities. Javidan et al. (2010) proposed that people working outside of

their native country and culture must have a “global mindset” comprised of three components, each in turn defined by three attributes:

- **Intellectual Capital:** which includes (a) global business savvy (how one’s industry and the larger economy operate on a worldwide basis); (b) cognitive complexity (the ability to piece together various or multiple scenarios with many moving parts; and (c) a cosmopolitan outlook (interest in the culture, history, political, and economic systems of different parts of the world).
- **Psychological Capital:** which includes (a) passion for diversity (openness to experiencing other cultures and trying new ways of doing things); (b) thirst for adventure (the ability to thrive in unpredictable and complex environments); and (c) self-assurance (self-confidence, a willingness to take risks, and high levels of energy).
- **Social Capital:** which includes (a) intercultural empathy (the ability to connect emotionally with people from different parts of the world); (b) interpersonal impact (the ability to bring together divergent views, reach consensus, and build networks); and (c) diplomacy (listening, asking questions, and ease with others who are different from you).

Javidan et al.’s (2010) framework was based on research with their Global Mindset Inventory (GMI) developed to measure these nine attributes. Javidan and Teagarden (2011) provided a full account of the GMI’s development, including its psychometric properties, reliability, and validity. It is likely that this article was intended for a U.S. audience who may need to work outside of the country, but the model would likely apply equally well to immigrants working in the U.S.

A widely cited article by Bird et al. (2010) is also relevant. Based on a review of the intercultural competence and expatriation literatures, Bird et al. (2010) proposed a model of intercultural competence that is comprised of three broad dimensions, with each characterized by specific facets that further define the dimension. Those broad dimensions included: Cognitive/Perceptual, Other/Relational, and Self/Self-efficacy which were later retitled as:

- **Perception Management:** How people cognitively approach cultural differences, people's mental flexibility when confronted with cultural differences, their ability to manage their perceptions, and their natural interest in cultures other than their own.
- **Relationship Management:** Peoples' orientation towards the importance of relationships in general, their awareness of others and the impact they have on them, and their style of interaction with others.
- **Self-Management Factors:** People's strength of identity, their ability to effectively manage their emotions and stress, and having a clear sense and understanding of ones' fundamental values.

The work of van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2014) illustrated the trait approach to intercultural competence in a comprehensive and scholarly review of the role and impact of personality on multicultural effectiveness; that is, "the process of adjustment to a new culture and dealing effectively with the challenges of an intercultural environment" (p. 250). In their chapter, van der Zee and van Oudenhoven constructed and presented a theoretical model linking personality to intercultural success. They documented the considerable research evidence for 10 discrete personality traits that link

them to one or another aspect of multicultural success, but also described the research support for four additional personality constructs they referred to as “metatraits,” (i.e., “traits that refer to a general sense of control in life, perseverance, or self-confidence” (p. 254), including core self-evaluations, motivational factors, coping strategies, and attachment styles. A summary of their findings is shown in Table 5. It should be noted that van der Zee and van Oudenhoven drew their research support from literatures on employees, immigrants, refugees, expatriates, and international students rather than focusing on immigrants only. Moreover, their review is meant to summarize the personality variables that are related to intercultural success when living or working in a country and culture that is different from one’s home county. Nonetheless, their findings (as shown in Table 5) should be relevant to immigrants moving to the U.S. to live and work.

Van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2014) went beyond simply identifying or listing the personality characteristics that are related to intercultural success and discuss “why specific personality variables make individuals better equipped to deal with intercultural situations” (p. 262). They described intercultural situations as a) potentially threatening and stressful, b) as characterized by opportunities for establishing a set of broader contacts (beyond one’s own cultural group), and opportunities for fostering enhanced learning and cognitive flexibility, and c) as potentially challenging to one’s identity. They then argued that some personality dimensions serve to *buffer* or protect individuals from the potential negative impacts of such challenges and opportunities (e.g., emotional stability, locus of control, emotion-focused coping styles). Other traits or aspects of personality do not seem to function to protect individuals from threats or help

them cope with stress but were shown to be helpful to the process of welcoming, exploring, and learning from the more challenging aspects of intercultural situations; and to evolve a more complex identity or sense of self. These included most social-perceptual traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, cultural empathy, motivational factors, self-efficacy, etc. They then presented a model where they proposed that the *stress-buffering* traits were particularly helpful in aiding a person to deal with the uncomfortable aspects of experiencing a new country and culture. When an individual overcomes and moves past the impact of “culture shock,” social-perceptual traits help the person acculturate and eventually reach a state of mastery where they experience stability and a satisfying sense of well-being.

**Table 5**

*Summary of Personality Characteristics Related to Intercultural Success*

Category	Specific Trait or Disposition
General personality traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extraversion (+)</li> <li>• agreeableness (+)</li> <li>• conscientiousness (+/0)</li> <li>• neuroticism (-)</li> <li>• intellect/autonomy (+)</li> </ul>
Intercultural personality traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural empathy (+)</li> <li>• open-mindedness (+)</li> <li>• social initiative (+)</li> <li>• emotional stability (+)</li> <li>• flexibility (+)</li> </ul>
Core self-evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-esteem (+)</li> <li>• generalized self-efficacy (+)</li> <li>• emotional stability (+)</li> <li>• locus of control (+)</li> <li>• self-monitoring (+)</li> </ul>



Category	Specific Trait or Disposition
Stable motivational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning goal orientation (+)</li> <li>• proving performance goal orientation (+)</li> <li>• avoiding performance goal orientation (-)</li> <li>• achievement motivation (+)</li> <li>• power motivation (+/-)</li> <li>• affiliation motivation (+/-)</li> </ul>
Coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• active, problem-focused coping (+)</li> <li>• passive emotion-focused coping (-)</li> <li>• passive cognitive coping (+)</li> </ul>
Attachment styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• secure attachment (+)</li> <li>• preoccupied attachment (-)</li> <li>• dismissive attachment (-)</li> <li>• fearful attachment (-)</li> </ul>

*Note:* From “Personality and Multicultural Effectiveness” by K. van der Zee and P. van Oudenhoven, in V. Benet-Martinez and Y. Hong (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity*, (pp. 261-262), 2014, Oxford University Press. Copyright 2014 by Oxford University Press.

Good language and communication skills (e.g., speaking, writing, listening) may be especially important for immigrant worker success in the U.S. – particularly for those that do not have English as their first language. In the workplace, it is important that employees understand their co-workers and management, and that they can be understood. Further, language skills and accent can operate as one factor that accentuates differences between immigrant and native-born workers and potentially contribute to additional challenges for immigrants such as stereotyping and discrimination (Bradley-Geist & Schmidtke, 2018). Finally, language fluency is likely needed for advancement to higher-level positions where skills such as persuasion and negotiation are required. Stokes (2017) reported that most Americans consider English fluency to be an important

attribute of U.S. nationality. Fully 70% of the public indicated that to be truly American it was very important to be able to speak English whereas Batalova et al. (2021) reported that approximately 46 percent of immigrants ages 5 and older were not proficient with spoken English.

The Pew Research Center (Bennet, 2020) reported that although the skill-levels and share of immigrant workers in higher-level jobs is rising, immigrants are less likely to work in jobs that place a higher degree of importance on non-mechanical skills. Pew analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Labor's Current Population Survey (CPS) of approximately 55,000 households and showed that fewer foreign-born workers have key skill sets (such as social skills, communication and other fundamental skills, analytical skills, or managerial skills) compared to U.S. born workers in high-skill jobs. Their report stated:

In 2018, fewer than a third of foreign-born workers (30%) were employed in occupations where social skills are "most important" ...compared with 44% of U.S.-born workers. The same pattern emerges for occupations in which fundamental skills are most important. Just one-in-four foreign-born workers were employed in these occupations, compared with about a third of U.S.-born workers (34%). (Bennet, 2020, p. 3)

However, their analyses also showed that the percentage of foreign-born workers in jobs where these skills were deemed important steadily increased over the 1995-2018 timeframe. This suggests that immigrant workers are acquiring and/or demonstrating greater amounts of certain skill sets as they successfully increase their employment in high-skill jobs, including increasing their:

- social perceptiveness, coordination, negotiation, and persuasion skills
- critical thinking and judgment and decision-making, writing, speaking, reading comprehension, active listening, and active learning
- science, mathematics, and technological skills; and complex problem solving and systems analysis skills
- skills involving management of personnel, financial resources, and material resources

### **Summary**

Clearly, traits have been shown to be related to potential for success at work for employees seeking advancement and promotion, including immigrant workers. A careful comparison of Table 1 to Table 5 shows almost complete overlap between the personality, learning, and motivational variables identified by Silzer and Church (2009), and the general and intercultural personality traits, core self-evaluation constructs, and motivational factors listed by Van der Zee and Van Oudenhven (2014). High potential models also consider and include “skills” that are learned and developed through experience. Campbell’s (2013) thoughtful review, as well as Bartram’s (2005) “Great Eight” competencies, support the notion that skills (not only traits) are common and important for managerial effectiveness across a variety of models and frameworks. However, the proposed *leadership pipeline* (Charan et al., 2011) and subsequent research supporting it strongly suggest that different skills are required at different levels of the organizational hierarchy. The report from the Pew Research Center (Bennet, 2020) provides some evidence that immigrant workers in the U.S. are making some progress in acquiring and demonstrating the important skills needed for success in U.S.

organizations. Literature involving intercultural *competence* (Javidan et al., 2010; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2014) is relevant, however, it is focused broadly on all who may work or live in a different country, including expatriates, other temporary workers, and international students, etc. who will (eventually) return to their home country. Immigrant workers differ in this regard. Migrating to a new country (e.g., the U.S.) is a relatively permanent decision and acquiring and demonstrating the traits and skills needed for success in the new country may operate with a different dynamic as a result.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Research Paradigm: Qualitative**

The intent of this research was to investigate the traits and skills of successful immigrant workers employed in American organizations. Qualitative research was the approach used for this study. It is an approach used for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative approaches attempt to answer the questions of “Who?,” “What?,” “When?,” “Where?,” and “Why?” rather than questions of whether or “if” something happened. Among the various common qualitative research approaches, Phenomenology was the best suited methodology for this study since it aims to understand the traits and skills of immigrant workers who have experienced success in the U.S. workplace.

### **Research Design**

Phenomenological studies are the “description of what an experience means to a person, or to a small group of people, who lived the experiences, and are able to retell the story of that experience” (Terrell, 2016, p. 146). To collect and understand the experiences of successful immigrant workers, an interview approach was used.

### **Participants and Sampling**

The study utilized purposive sampling, meaning the group of interest (successful immigrant workers) were already identified. The number of participants were 10 immigrants who had moved to a mid-level or senior managerial-level position in U.S. organization with a minimum of six months of experience in their current role. For a

subset of participants, hiring managers were also interviewed. Thus, two perspectives of the successful immigrant's experience were obtained.

Table 6 shows the descriptive information for the sample of immigrant workers who were interviewed. Participants in this category were experienced immigrants. Eight of 10 were 46 years old or older. They were accomplished both academically and career wise, with 90% of the participants having earned a graduate degree. Promotions ranged from a supervisory role to a senior vice president position. Half of the immigrant participant sample reported they had been promoted more than three times in their career, including one participant who had been promoted eight times. These immigrants have lived in the United States between 10-40 years and beyond, and all have had considerable experience working in the US organizations.

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics for Immigrant Workers*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	6	60
Female	4	40
Age		
35-45	2	20
46-55	3	30
56 and over	5	50
Highest educational level		
Bachelor's degree	1	10
Graduate degree	9	90

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Birthplace</b>		
Africa	6	60
Asia	3	30
Latin America	1	10
<b>Number of years in the US</b>		
10-20	3	30
21-30	5	50
31-40		
More than 40	2	20
<b>Number of years in the US workforce</b>		
5-10	3	30
11-20	5	50
More than 20	2	20
<b>Industry</b>		
Banking/Finance	2	20
Nonprofit	4	40
Hotel Management	1	10
Real Estate/Investment	1	10
Manufacturing/Production	1	10
Food/Agriculture	1	10
<b>Number of promotions received</b>		
1-2	5	50
3-5	4	40
6 and more	1	10

Table 7 presents the descriptive information for the sample of hiring managers who were interviewed. The sample of hiring managers was composed of very experienced individuals who had interviewed, hired, and promoted immigrant employees for 10-25 years. They were employed in government, facilities management, medical

devices, and nonprofit organizations. Those interviewed were between the ages of 50-60 years or older. Sixty percent of the hiring managers had graduate level degrees. Forty percent were male while 60% were female hiring managers.

**Table 7**

*Descriptive Statistics for Hiring Managers*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	2	40
Female	3	60
<b>Age</b>		
50-55	1	20
56-60	2	40
61 or older	2	40
<b>Highest education Level</b>		
Associate degree	1	20
Bachelor's degree	1	20
Graduate degree	3	60
<b>Industry</b>		
Government	1	20
Facilities Management	1	20
Medical Device	1	20
Nonprofit	2	40
<b>Number of years hiring immigrants</b>		
5-10	1	20
11-15	1	20
16-20		
21-25	3	60



## **Instruments**

Data (for both employee and manager participants) were collected through the use of a semi-structured interview process. Interview questions were designed to explore the underlying traits and skills participants believe they possess that led to successful experiences in their work lives. Copies of the interview protocols for both the employee and manager participants are attached in the Appendices.

## **Research Procedures**

Participants for this study were recruited through the researcher's professional network by emails, letters, and advertisement. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the process utilized Zoom video technology. All participants were screened to ensure they meet the criteria for inclusion in this study. For those participants who met the criteria, a 60–90-minute interview was scheduled at a time convenient to them. In advance of the interview, employee participants were asked to provide their resume so that the interview process would proceed most efficiently. Participation in the interview was voluntary, and interviewees had the opportunity to discontinue the process at any time.

## **Data Analysis**

For accuracy and validity, an initial draft copy of the transcript was sent to the interviewees who were asked to confirm that all information was complete and accurate. The approved transcript was saved to Microsoft OneNote to minimize errors or misconceptions. The data was then analyzed and coded to identify preliminary themes. Preliminary themes were categorized into more meaningful and manageable set of “higher-order-themes.”

Coding interview data followed procedures outlined by Saldana (2014). Specifically, “process coding” was used whereby a word or short phrase was assigned to accurately label and summarize the most relevant responses from interviewees to the interview questions. Similar or comparable codes were categorized together for further analysis and identification of patterns or themes that could be interrelated or connected to arrive at a final set of higher order themes or clusters that best captured and characterized the interview data. Process coding was preferred as the coding strategy in contrast to other methods (e.g., in vivo coding) since it provides the researcher with the greatest latitude in selecting a label or phrase that most accurately reflect the interviewee’s comments and responses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The identities of participants and their employers have been kept confidential. Each participant was asked to indicate their agreement to participate by signing an informed consent form prior to the interview. All communication between the interviewer and the interviewees were retained on the researcher’s personal computer which is password protected. This included interview transcripts and other field notes. All data collected during this process will be stored for a maximum of three years in accordance with the University of St. Thomas IRB document and data destruction policies and guidelines.

### **Summary**

The research findings are to be used as a checklist for immigrants who want to be successful in American organizations. A qualitative approach was used because it was the best suited for accuracy. Immigrant workers who have lived the experience of gaining

promotion within American organizations and hiring managers who have hired and promoted immigrants volunteered as participants and give their best and most accurate versions of their experiences.

## Chapter 4: Summaries of Interviews

### Summaries of Interviews with Immigrants

#### *Immigrant Interview 1 Summary – Elena*

Elena was my very first interviewee. She immigrated to the United States in 1999 from Latin America. Elena completed her education in her home country. She holds a bachelor's degree in Mass Communication (BS) and a master's degree (MS) in Finance. She currently serves as the Credit Manager for her current company. She has been working at this company for last 16 years. Elena shared that she moved to the United States for better opportunities.

Elena has received 2-3 promotions and is currently leading her organization's credit management. I wanted to find out what her promotion process has been like or what specifically helped her gain promotion. She shared:

I think experience, knowledge, and communication helped me gain promotion.

I'm a person who normally likes to communicate with people. So, I think these are the three things the organization saw in me in order to give me the opportunity to supervise five people.

Elena had some important personal traits and characteristics that also helped her with the promotion process. She discussed being a team player, honesty, meeting deadlines, listening to others, and treating everyone with respect as traits that have helped her career.

On the personal side, I'm a team player and I think that's something they saw in me. I like to be honest with people and vice versa. I also think I'm a hard-working person. I meet deadlines and that is very important. This is needed in a lot of jobs.

When you have a commitment, and you meet it; that is commendable. I'm a person that gives 100% of myself. I'm also able to interact with different types of cultures with respect. This is very important when you are living in the USA and interacting with people from all over the world. We are all different; so, we need to listen and understand that there are differences between us, but also respect each other.

Elena experienced some difficulties when she initially came to the United States. She felt that her English was not proficient enough, and she wasn't confident whenever she stood in front of a crowd to speak. She later gained confidence by accepting the fact that English was her second language, and people should expect that it will not be perfect. This was Elena's narrative when I asked her about challenges or difficulties she faced:

In the beginning I wasn't confident when I was in front of a big group and had to speak English. I knew that everybody in the room spoke English as their first language and I was the only person who had English as my second language. It was a challenge for me, but I slowly understood that everyone knew English was my second language just from the way I looked--I'm 100% Latin American. They also recognize it when I speak, due to my accent. After that, I felt very confident that they should expect that my English will not be perfect, because it is not my first language. I reminded myself that a lot of these people sitting in the room only spoke one language and I spoke two languages. That was something to be proud of.

On the topic of adjustment to life in the U.S., Elena stated she has adjusted about 90%. She felt like the remaining 10% was personal friendships and relationships that she had in her home country that could not be replicated here. Regarding adjusting to a new culture, environment, and working, she said:

It has not been easy. This is a different country, a different culture, and a different environment to work in. It took time for me to adjust to this country and there are still things I miss from my country, but I'm happy here. I would say I'm 90% adjusted. I think the 10% is more on the personal side. I miss my friends. It's hard for me to make friends here. It's a little harder here to really establish a relationship with a person that you can call a friend, a true friend.

Elena also had mentors that helped her along the way. She stated that she currently has a mentor. This is how she described her experience with mentors and how they have been beneficial to her:

I have a mentor. My mentor is someone I can talk to about everything going on in my work life and personal life. I'm pretty honest with her. She gives me general advice that I trust. I know that the feedback is going to be good for me even though it sometimes makes me feel very uncomfortable and not very confident, but I accept it. We meet on a quarterly basis. I will highly recommend that everybody gets a mentor that you really have a relationship with. You have to be careful who you choose as a mentor.

Other skills or traits that Elena had to demonstrate to succeed in getting promotions is her yearning to continuously learn new things. She stated:

I'm a person who always want to learn new things. I don't wait for somebody to tell me how to do stuff. I find a way to learn by myself and if I don't find the answer, I ask for help. I think the mentality to always learn has taken me to where I am today. I like to learn new things. I find ways to learn, and that's a good skill to have. I'm a person who is always desperate to learn new things.

Looking back on her journey, Elena feels that the only thing she would do differently is sharing her ideas and opinions more often. This is what she shared:

Maybe the only thing I would have done different in the beginning was not to be a quiet person during conversations around work. As I stated earlier my challenge was to speak up in front of people. I wish I would have spoken up and expressed my opinions back then.

Elena identified education and knowledge as the key to success for incoming immigrants seeking success in American organizations. Elena elaborated:

I am a big believer that education opens doors for you. Education is power. It doesn't matter what type of position you have; whether it's in a corporation or construction; the education that you have opens doors for you. What I would recommend is: education, increase your knowledge, keep learning, and become an expert in whatever subject you like. Learn English--don't stop learning English--and be committed. Set up goals for yourself. Where do you want to see yourself in one year, two years, three years and so forth.

### ***Immigrant Interview 2 Summary – Kenji***

Kenji was the second interviewee. He immigrated along with his parents from Southeast Asia to escape the war and improve their economic status. He came to the

United States at a very early age. He did not have much education in his home country. Coming to the United States at an early age and starting at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level was challenging for him. He did not know the language and neither did his parents. Communication and completing school assignments were challenging and stood as roadblocks for a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader, but Kenji persevered.

His family moved to Minnesota, where he graduated from both middle school and high school. Due to the hardship his parents endured, he knew that to be successful in the United States would require some level of education and training, so he pursued his education by obtaining a degree in Engineering and several licenses in Insurance and Real Estate Mortgage. He has worked in corporate America, serving in several different capacities in major banking institutions. Kenji is now serving as an assistant manager. In his current leadership role, he helps people who do not have opportunities due to their economic status or background. Looking back on what helped him achieve the leadership positions and success he enjoys today, Kenji explained that interpersonal skills are very important and should not be overlooked. He emphasized listening skills in particular:

From all the layers that I've been exposed to, especially from being on the leadership team, or in leadership capacity, some of the very important strong aspects for me is a leader who is open minded – meaning that I take input and value other people's suggestions, ideas, or recommendations that come in from the team. So, the listening skills, the ideas that come in from the team, looking at it and then making a decision that will be driven by a collective effort for the betterment of the overall team.



In addition to listening, Kenji stressed other skills for leadership that he utilized to become successful. According to Kenji, collaboration and respect for an individual race, ethnicity, academic achievement, and upbringing should all be considered when individuals are working together. He elaborated:

The capacity to just be able to work with others as a team is crucial for anything. Whether I was running a business or when I was in the banking industry, I had to have that capacity to be willing or able to work with others collectively as a team. There are days and times when we are needed to work individually but I think in this day and age, collaboration and collective effort can go much farther and longer than one person generating and then implementing their own ideas. I will also say, value the background of each individual. By that I mean we are all from different ethnic, racial, and academic backgrounds. So, just being willing to value each individual with their own ideas, their own background as well. We all are different, and we all may approach a subject differently, but coming together as a team and looking at it as a whole, and then accessing the different ideas and approaches and strategies, make it the best it can be. For me, I've always been very open to making sure that I do not cross over to where I am offending another person.

Patience, a willingness to learn, humility, and vulnerability were all character traits that Kenji employed.

One of the important traits I would say I hold as an individual is that I'm quite patient. You know—patience, patience, patience; and the willingness to learn.

Also, if I'm not well versed in an area, I try to be humble about my weakness or about where I'm deficient and be willing to seek help.

There were times when Kenji had to go above and beyond or do things differently from his American counterparts or what was expected of him. He took initiative.

Whenever training was not available in the workplace, he self-initiated them. He was proactive and wanted to leave a mark on any position he previously held. He said:

For me, the thing that I actually had to do was just take initiative like doing some self-training or self-learning through online training or courses. That's the one thing I've tried to do. For me as an individual I always have this desire for new and additional knowledge. I feel that I can never know enough or learn enough; so, I make it a point to be constantly learning. Whether learning from an actual course and getting some sort of certification; learning about new ideas or topics or learning about new subjects which might take just about an hour or two. I want to make sure that I'm learning that I know more today than yesterday, and that I know more this year than last year.

Kenji learned from others who he believed had effective leadership styles and utilized his teammates as coaches. He did not have a formal mentor, but he utilized what he had.

I did not have any formal mentors assigned to or aligned with me, but I tried to get some mentoring by listening to how leaders approach their teams. I tried to listen to how good leaders differentiated themselves from leaders who are not willing to work with their staff. I tried to pick up good practices from effective leaders, add it on to things that I already knew, and continue to grow and apply it

to my own daily work or my own daily personal life. So, making sure that I'm taking advantage of my surroundings, my colleagues, or other leaders or former leaders.

Kenji had to deal with racism both at school and in the workplace, but he was able to turn an unpleasant experience into teaching. He felt that he could use his strengths by patiently helping others understand that what they were doing was bordering on racism.

So, racism. I had some experience personally when I was much younger like when I was in grade school and coming across other young children. I was faced with challenges of racism because of my color, because of my language, or because I was not able to speak the language as clearly or as effectively as our Caucasian American counterparts. As for the work environment, I would say I've had one experience during my years as a Real Estate Consultant. This is how I approached it: I did not attack that person, but I did reach out and share with them. I explained the situation and I made sure that they were clear that what they did was wrong. I wanted them to be aware of their actions and to do a self-reflection or assessment of what they did. I'm a patient person, so I use the opportunity to share with individuals and to give them the opportunity to improve themselves as well.

### ***Immigrant Interview 3 Summary – Benedict***

Benedict, my third interviewee, is an immigrant from Africa who immigrated to the United States in 2001 on a scholarship. With only a high school education from his home country, Benedict has been strategically focused on obtaining advance education in the United States. He has been able to obtain double bachelor's as well as double

master's degrees and is now at the brink of completing his doctorate. During his educational journey, Benedict has been fortunate to work with several companies within the medical industry and has been successful in gaining promotion to a leadership position. Landing a leadership position was not an easy task. He started his career from an entry level position as a full-time employee and a full-time student. Through the many difficulties he faced, Benedict stayed focused on his education. He believed that obtaining higher education was the key to gaining success in the United States. When I asked what his promotion process was like, he explained the complexities in this manner:

It has been very challenging for me. When I started my career in the medical industry, I only had a high school diploma; so, I started to pursue my bachelor's degree to uplift myself. After getting those degrees, I tried on so many occasions to get a leadership position, but I was denied several times. I went for interviews so many times for a company that I had worked for over 15 years, and I was denied. I was told 'you did everything right, but you do not have the necessary experience so we cannot offer you this position.' On the other hand, there were people who didn't have bachelor degrees while I had double master's degree, yet I could not excel. There were people trained by me and later became my bosses.

Viewing Benedict's resume and realizing the many degrees he had obtained; I was interested in finding out how he overcame all of those hurdles; he responded that those denials did not deter him from continuing on. He persevered, remaining focused and humbled.

It was challenging, but that did not deter me from pushing forward. I did not demur on pursuing my academic journey. I felt experience was a factor but there

were other employees with less academic achievements and no experience, and they were given the opportunities. I felt bad about the situation, but I kept moving forward. In 2018, I had the opportunity to be interviewed by another company for a managerial position. The hiring manager was impressed, and the interview went well. I rose from a trainer position straight to a managerial position. In that position, I managed 7 supervisors and 120 employees, and it went well for me and the team.

Apart from having patience, maintaining focus, and humility, there are other skills Benedict had to acquire for leadership. Benedict discussed those skills in the following way:

Leadership-wise, one of the things that was advantageous for me was the language. I was able to communicate vividly, and people understood me unlike some other immigrants from African countries where English is not the official language. That was one of the key things that helped in elevating me to a leadership role. I was able to communicate well. Problem solving skills are also important. Whenever people go into leadership positions, there are a few things people look at: Do you have the experience? Who has been here before? Who understands what is going on and who can solve problems? Who understands diversity and inclusion, and cultural sensitivity? Those were some of the skills and competencies that helped me excel to where I am today.

In addition to previous personal traits and characteristics that helped Benedict along the way, he also mentioned traits like integrity, collaboration, respect, and honesty:

Another thing is integrity. Integrity is very important in leadership if you want to excel, you have to say what you mean and mean what you say. If you do not have integrity, your ability to excel to a leadership position would be very slim. Lastly, I would mention teamwork and respect. As a manager, one of the things I usually tell my team is, the man who considers himself the smartest man in the room will never become successful. If you want to become successful in a team, you must understand that teamwork is very important, and you must respect other people. You must be able to incorporate their ideas. You must be able to listen to them because if you are open minded, bring in their ideas, and work with them, you will become successful. Honesty is also very important to gain promotion.

Did Benedict do things differently than his fellow American counterparts? He explained that he had to work 3-4 times harder than his American counterparts. He also told me that he sought mentorship for guidance and self-confidence.

I had to work harder than the Americans I met here. I had to work 3-4 times harder. As I said, in my experience I had with a company where I worked for 15 years, I had the qualifications for promotion and yet they said I didn't have the experience. On the other hand, I had to comport myself and try not to make any mistake. I also had a mentor that helped me along the way. She was a professor in my master's program, and I looked to her for inspiration for a very long time. I wanted to use her as a role model and since then we have become friends and I have continued to receive advice from her.

Benedict, like most immigrants, also experienced racism in the workplace but was able to deal with it professionally and humbly. At his previous company, he had applied for a position that one of his trainees had also applied for. He explained:

When I was serving as a trainer at this company, a woman who I used to train did not have a bachelor's degree but was competing for the same position as me. At that time, I had double bachelor's and double master's degrees, but she was given the job and I was denied. She felt embarrassed and was shaken. She came to me and said 'I didn't know you applied; if I knew you did, I wouldn't have because you are more qualified than me. You've gotten all these degrees; you've gotten all the experience that I don't have, and the job was given to me.' I told her 'Don't be embarrassed, it's not your fault, if you think I can help you in this position, reach out to me. I'm here to help. I will help you throughout the way and if you think you need my experience, I'm going to work with you. You're going to be my boss now.'

Benedict had some advice for incoming immigrants who want to be successful in American organization—work hard, gain work experience, seek mentorship, and pursue education. He said:

One piece of advice I would give to incoming immigrants, if you are from sub-Saharan countries—all the countries that are in Africa except those in North Africa—whether that's Ghana, Sierra Leone, East Africa, South Africa, when you come to the United States, try to acquire some job experience. Some studies have shown that degrees from Africa are being overlooked. So, while it is true that you want to go to school it's also important that while you are in school, look for areas

that you are passionate about and get those experiences. It's experience, experience, experience before your education. You can have all the degrees but if you don't have the experience, it's going to be hard for you to excel. Secondly, as an immigrant, you know you are from a very poor country, when you come to this country stay away from trouble, be focused! Pay attention to what you want to achieve. There are lots of opportunities that our countries in Africa could not have given us so, be strategic, work with other people, get away from bad friends, look for mentors, and look for people that will guide you in a positive direction.

#### ***Immigrant Interview 4 Summary – Min***

There are many reasons why people immigrate to the United States. Min, my 4<sup>th</sup> interviewee, emigrated from Asia to the United States in 2013 after she married an American. Min is a consultant with a global Food and Agriculture company. She has worked in many multinational organizations as manager. Before coming to the United States, Min obtained her bachelor's degree in English Literature in her home country. She later obtained her Master's in Human Resources from the University of Minnesota.

While in the United States, Min has been promoted twice to managerial positions. She was promoted from a consultant to a managerial role where she worked with the leadership team at the same time alongside employees. She had to utilize two important skills in those positions, i.e., strategic thinking and relationship building. She explained:

After I immigrated to the U.S., I was promoted from a Talent Manager Consultant to an HR Manager role. This was a bit of a shift for me. In the Talent Management Consultant role, I thought of how to complete a particular project but in the HR role, I had to think of business strategies for business units and how



I could support the business unit to complete this particular goal from an HR perspective. I think this is important to think more strategically and in the long term, not just 2 months or 3 months. In the HR Management role, working with all the leaders and managers, it is really important to build that relationship and trust at first and then you can work with them to resolve issues. Without relationships and trust, you cannot work a lot with the leaders and managers.

In addition to the skills Min exhibited for promotion, she also has some personal traits and characteristics. She noted that her ability to learn fast and ask questions for clarity was important for her. She is also an achiever and was able to show results to her bosses. This is how Min explained the utilization of her various traits:

I think learning agility is important. It allows you to learn as much as you can in a very short time and ask a lot of questions. It is important for your business unit.

Another trait of mine (in StrengthsFinder terms) is Achiever. It is also a very important trait for me because leaders want to see results. They just do not want to hear you talking. So, I always ask what is the next step? The next step is what I take because I would like to take action to get results. I remember doing some interviews in my HR role to understand the drivers for the high turnover in that business unit. We came up with a very good plan in that business unit to address the turnover issues like training and workforce flexibility—and, after one year, we found out that the turnover had decreased.

Another important trait for Min was being respectful of others both culturally and professionally. She also utilized her diverse mindset based on her international experience as an immigrant. It is important to bring the aspect of global thinking to team

conversations but to do so in a respectful manner. She stressed the need to work hard at learning English so that you have a clear understanding of what your team members are saying from an American perspective, or in other words, have some sense of cultural awareness. She explained:

I think my American counterparts definitely have a different perspective. Most of my team members are mostly white people who probably do not have international experience so I contributed to the conversation since I could think differently from them. I could say maybe this is something I came across when I was in Shanghai or a different global company. I think that is an advantage because as immigrants we have different international experiences. I think it is important to contribute to that conversation in a very diplomatic way. I am still learning and do not want to come across as aggressive or trying to dominate the conversation. I think it's very important to contribute a very diverse perspective but do it respectfully. Another thing would probably be to work harder because English is not my native language. I probably have to read it several times to understand it and make sure that my understanding is correct. It may be that in my culture, this is perceived differently, but in U.S. culture it is perceived another way. So, cultural awareness is very important.

Min joined several mentoring groups and was lucky to be matched with a mentor within her organization who had the same background as hers that she could relate to culturally and professionally. Networking also helped her a lot. Apart from peer-to-peer networking, she had to network with other teams or organization to gain visibility.

I joined several mentoring programs in the companies I worked for, but I don't know if it contributed to my promotion. In the organization I worked for, I joined the mentoring program, specially designed for the Asian population where they match you with a very high-level executive in the company. I got from her perspective what was expected of me, and she shared with me some career advice from her career experience. The other one was more like peer to peer mentoring, but these programs are still very valuable for you to understand how to get career advice and how to be better in your job. Another one is networking which is also very important for promotion. I feel like the immigrants from my experience are always focused on their work, but I think if you really want to get promoted you have to get out of your team or network and network with others. Maybe as you work on some initiatives or priorities you may come across these people, and you've already built this network with them, so it really helps you to get promoted or shows your relationship-building skills.

Min emphasized her drive to achieve results in any role she was put into. This, she believed, helped her gain promotion. There were instances where she did not have the requisite qualifications but her record of achieving results in previous roles became the deciding factor. This is how she explained one of her subsequent promotions:

In my current organization, they were looking for organization design experience and I did not have that in my resume, but I think they saw my ability to deliver results in previous roles therefore I could achieve the result in this role too. Again, the learning agility. I don't have any experience in organization design but at this company, they have all the training in organization design, so they said we can

train you. I think all these skills demonstrated in previous jobs helped me to transition to a different organization or a different role.

Adjustment for immigrants is always difficult regarding food, language, or just navigating the city. For Min, it was no different. She is still not fully adjusted even after ten years. She encourages incoming immigrants to step out of their comfort zones and be curious:

I think nothing is easy in this process. For me particularly, is the food. You have totally different food in the U.S. An example is finding warm water. Here everyone drinks ice water and in China everyone drinks warm water. Whenever I was asking for warm water in a restaurant, everyone gave me a surprised look, like ‘are you crazy?’ I feel once you learn you can find a way to keep your old habits. Even now I still drink warm water. I have been in the U.S. for 10-11 years, but I still feel that I’m learning new stuff every day. I feel it’s very helpful to adjust to U.S. culture by asking good questions and being more social. In the U.S. when you go to a party, first you think about what to say or who to talk to. You have to step out of your comfort zone to talk to people. I start small conversations like ‘hi, how’s the weather? How’s your family? How many kids do you have?’ And all these conversations help you understand more about the U.S. culture. Also, having curiosity. I am always curious and asking questions. That helped me understand different people thinking and behavior in the U.S.

Speaking English in the United States is very important. In Min’s role in Human Resources, she experienced difficulty and had to exert more effort in learning English and being vulnerable. She volunteered to draft communications even though she was not the

best person to do it due to the language barrier. Practicing your communication skills or joining a public speaking club like Toast Masters is a great way to improve your English language, according to Min.

As I mentioned, I definitely had to spend a lot of time understanding some communications. I also had to be very careful in my choice of words because of the differences in meanings. I had to be careful when talking with employees especially, when I was in the HR manager role. The employee population was very diverse so, I had to be very careful with the language I was using with them in case we had different understandings of words or phrases. When they talked about something I didn't understand, I asked them for clarification. So, definitely it takes more time for me to understand what they were saying and also more time for me to structure my response. It's a very delicate role. I also had to apply practice in my work. Sometimes I volunteer to draft the communication. Even though it took me a longer time to draft it, I thought the more I practice, the better I would become. I would ask the other coworker to proofread and edit for me and I could see how they worded the communication and what other perspectives they would include in that communication. I also joined Toast Masters. I think that was a great way to practice my public speaking skills in a safe environment and also get feedback from them.

After all of the experiences Min has had in American organizations and the promotion process, she had some advice for incoming immigrants.

Speak up! I think confidence is really important. When immigrants from other countries come to the U.S., our confidence level decreases because there are a lot

of things we don't understand, and we cannot explain very well. With the initial language barrier, we cannot really talk to everybody very freely but, at the same time, immigrants' skills and competencies are still very good and effective—but because of the change from one culture to another culture, it definitely becomes a long process. It's very important to remind yourself that you are still very good, and you have these very great ideas and perspectives. I once received a comment from my previous manager who said, 'hey, you have to build up your confidence level.' Even though I feel that I am very confident, there is a difference in how confidence is demonstrated in U.S. culture compared to Chinese culture where you need to appear humble. Some people don't know what they are doing but they still appear very confident in the U.S. culture.

#### ***Immigrant Interview 5 Summary – Fatimah***

Fatimah was my fifth interviewee. She immigrated to the United States from Asia in 2008 for advanced education. Fatimah obtained both bachelor's and master's degrees in the United States. She is now pursuing her doctorate degree. She is also currently a director at one of the leading privately owned hotel chains in Minnesota. Fatimah has been working in this company for approximately 7 years. Before transitioning into the role of director, Fatimah began her career as a coordinator in a previous company but moved to her current company where she has experienced tremendous growth. She got promoted to a Consultant, Senior Human Resource (HR) Manager, and Director of Human Resource. As Director of HR, she manages five different locations with all HR professionals reporting to her. Fatimah's quest for advanced education has paid off. It has given her leverage compared to other employees. Relative to her promotion process,

Fatimah revealed during our interview that her promotions were mostly based on her level of advanced education, hard work, and experience. She explained that she was asked to serve in those roles based on the recognition of her talent and education.

It's been great. I've developed my skills and experience within the company. I have been there for 7 years. I will say that I've been very lucky to have really great leaders and managers who see my talents and my capabilities. Luckily, I did not really apply for all those positions that I have been promoted to. It was just given and I'm sure that's because of my experience and my education. I have been given the opportunity to pick up new roles during the 7 years within the company. Before I joined this company, I was in a different company for about 2 years as HR Coordinator and then I decided to move to this company. That's when my promotion and growth happened.

Fatimah's ability to take initiative with self-training was very important for her first managerial role. Even though she was not a manager at the time, she took on the role of a manager and learned quickly. Her capabilities were acknowledged by her counterparts. She was also respectful of other cultures. She built relationships and listened. This was Fatimah's first experience in a leadership position. She explained:

Speaking about my first management role, it was a little bit different. Before I was given the role, I began working by myself independently because my boss at the time, was overseeing multiple locations. She was responsible for 2 different properties, and she was not in the office all the time. I was by myself and leading the office even though I was not promoted as the manager. I would say from my first managerial role, the biggest lesson is to be able to work with people of

different cultures especially being a new leader, or a ‘green’ leader with less experience. How you present yourself, and at the same time as a younger generation coming in, it’s important to make people believe in you, listen to your advice, work with you closely, and trust that you have the capability to do your job.

Fatimah utilized some personal traits and characteristics. She mentioned honesty and open-mindedness. From a Human Resources perspective, Fatimah stated that a lot of employees face daily challenges so one must have an open mind and encourage trust.

For myself, I think being honest and open-minded are two of the biggest things you need be successful here. I think honesty is a huge thing and we need to be honest and open to build trust among people especially in my role. You know I work in Human Resources; I deal with employees, people, and challenges in recruiting all the time. To be able to have that open mind and honesty that make people trust you is one of the biggest strengths that I see in myself. That also allowed people to come to me with questions or challenges—and if I was able to assist them and make them a better person, that also made me happy.

According to Fatimah, immigrants should use their global experience and diverse mindset to contribute to the various organizations that employ them. They must see their diversity as an advantage. When asked if she had to do anything differently as an immigrant, she explained:

I don’t see myself doing anything different *per se*. I just think as an immigrant, it gives me a very strong advantage compared to a lot of people because of the diversity and inclusion mindset and the experience that I have compared to a lot



of local people that might not have that firsthand experience. My education level is different; and my experience is different. Coming in with that level of education and experience, that makes me stand out. If you ask me the question, ‘what did I do differently compared to other people to get promotions?’, the answer is really trying to blend in my skills and knowledge that I have into the American culture. People at the American workplace have a different kind of culture. When I try to connect with people, it’s harder because people like to talk about sports, about baseball and soccer, and it’s just different because it doesn’t relate to me but it’s the big thing people use to connect and network. For me, that’s the part I work hard at to make the connections and that’s what we call professional networking. It’s one part that I think was really challenging for me.

She also recognized that she utilized other traits like flexibility, continuous learning, and going above and beyond to gain subsequent promotions. Fatimah mentioned:

I think flexibility and constant learning are important. A lot of times, I see the challenge with immigrants or even younger generations being complacent in proceeding with their career. They decide that they are good at a certain stage. They think “I’m good, I’ve learned everything and I’m good, I’m a professional.” What I think is important is: to continue learning and understand that there are always new things that will pop up in our lives that we need to admit that we don’t know that there are always new things to learn, as well as be flexible and willing to do extra.

Fatimah also faced racism and discrimination. In her role as Senior Human Resource Manager, she had to onboard someone who had 15-20 years of human resources experience. This individual did not like the fact that she had to be trained by Fatimah who was not an American, had an accent, and was from a younger generation.

I don't see myself different than other people. I see myself as the same or just another employee. I never use my race, my country, or gender for anything. I use my skills and my capabilities. At the same time, I do not care about how people look at me. That does not mean that people do not discriminate against me or judge me, though. One great example I have is when I had to train or onboard a new director of Human Resources who had 15-20 years of experience working within HR. I was trying to use technology to assist her and get her trained, but she was just having a hard time. She said 'I don't understand what you're talking about. Why are we doing this?' However, whenever I assigned someone else to help, she didn't have any challenge. She only had challenges or complaints when she worked with me. Looking back, what I have realized is she did not like getting advice from me. In the end, I realized that we weren't having technical challenges, it was more about her not wanting or being willing to learn from me compared to other people. The only thing that I can see now and understand is the challenge was because I'm not an American, I'm also a younger generation than her, and was now in the position to train her. I did not understand this until the manager above me said, 'well, it looks like you're having some challenges with what could potentially be your race, your gender, or the other identities you bring in.' So, to answer your question in a real-life way, I never really had this

experience until lately. I didn't even think about it until that conversation, I have to admit that. The very possible reason is because I'm an immigrant.

With all of the many experiences Fatimah has had, her advice to incoming immigrants who want success while working in American organizations is to stand up for yourself.

I would say stand up for yourself. Every culture is different, but I would say coming from my culture, and a very Chinese traditional family, we don't confront people, we don't stand up, we don't tell our parents or our teachers they are wrong. The parents and teachers are always right, and the boss and managers are always right but I would challenge the new immigrant kids. If you think this is right, you should fight for your right in a professional way. You should never just give in. We should tell people that we are not just followers. We can be leaders as well. I think that's one of the things that I continue to tell myself, if I don't agree with stuff, I will explain myself. People can accept it, or people can deny it, but at least I would have done everything that I could do to protect myself and have a voice in this situation.

### ***Immigrant Interview 6 Summary – Abeba***

Abeba was my sixth interviewee. She is an African immigrant who immigrated to the United States at a very young age along with her parents in the early 80s. She completed her primary, secondary, and post-graduate studies in the United States. Abeba is currently working towards acquiring a doctorate degree. She has transitioned through many roles from a stockbroker immediately after graduating from the University of Minnesota to a Business Manager, a Director of Finance, an Adjunct Professor and Vice

President. From the inception of her career journey, Abeba quickly learned that the corporate environment was not interesting or exciting for her, so she began experimenting with nonprofit organizations. She found excitement, peace, and satisfaction and began to grow professionally.

Abeba, with a growth mindset, focused her attention on acquiring adequate education to impact change and help folks in the organization where she worked. Her challenges in the United States began at an early age. At school, she was put in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to improve her English. This was meant for students who had English as another language in their home country. That did not stop her perseverance, she was able to pull through and went on to be successful. When I asked how she was able to communicate at an early age and after just arriving from Africa, she told me this:

I started school at a very early age and so I had some challenges as you would imagine. Coming from Africa, I had an accent, so they tried to pull me into ESL as it was called back in those days, in the 80s.

After overcoming issues with her African accent and completing school, Abeba had to exhibit all her skills to prove to her employers that she was ready for promotion or worthy of being promoted. She is a fast learner and took initiatives in every role she held. In her role as Business Manager at one of the schools she worked at, she taught herself Accounting, Human Resources (HR), and Information Technology (IT). She also did a lot of networking with people in similar situations. This was our conversation on her first role.

I got the position as a Business Manager, I had some training on school finance; after a while I picked up on it and, in my role, I was doing Accounting, HR, managing IT. I had to learn all those things—it was essentially like non-profit operations and management. So, I learned hands-on. I received some training from this company, but others were just from networking. I started meeting other people at other schools, connecting with people because those schools were also nonprofits.

As she continued to take initiative, Abeba also volunteered for other duties that were not part of her responsibilities. She was very adaptive as well as receptive to feedback. She showed interest in the organization's mission. When asked how she demonstrated skills to help her gain promotion, she stated:

I think it's being committed to my work, staying on task, and being creative in thinking about processes. Not just sticking to 'well, we did this for 10 years so we're just going to keep doing it.' I was very receptive to feedback from other people and some of it was pro-actively sought out. Questions like 'what do you do as a teacher here? What do you think about our hiring process? What do you think about our accounting process? What are some things that you would like to see change?' I showed that I was willing to be nimble and flexible and adaptive. It was clear that I was committed to the mission of the organization, because when you work in a nonprofit you don't just get to sit in your little silo environment. You kind of have to volunteer. It's all hands-on deck mentality. It became clear to my bosses and leader, that I was invested in the mission. I think that helped.

Abeba always performed at her highest capacity. She strived for excellence in whichever position she held. During our discussion, she narrated that all of her subsequent promotions came as the result of her being the most prepared person at the time. Whenever a new position was created in the organization, she was the most prepared person available based on her past performance.

My position at the charter school came about when we were restructuring. The organization had grown and the needs for the organization also grew. We no longer had a need for a business manager, we needed more of a director. Someone who could do strategic planning and someone who could lead a team. That's how that promotion came about. I had previously served in that capacity for a while, and I think I did a good job so; I was obviously the best suited for the promotion. I will say the other position at the other organization was similar. We launched a strategic framework that called for a different type of leadership over HR. The organization realized that it could do more with talent and culture. Given my performance in the director role, they saw me as the right fit. It's definitely a higher-level role. So that's kind of how it evolved into a Vice President versus a Director.

On a personal level, Abeba had to demonstrate some specific personal traits and characteristics in order to succeed. She highlighted the importance of integrity and confidence.

I think confidence and integrity are important. What I learned later in my career is that I was not as confident as I am now, back when I started. I think I'm more confident now because confidence in your profession comes with years of

experience. You can have 20 years and you still go through imposter syndrome every now and then. As a young black woman in a leadership role where you're dealing with finance at a charter school—where one of the biggest challenges or things that happen, unfortunately, with those organizations is mismanagement of funds—I was always very cognizant of that. I made a lot of decisions around that. I didn't allow people to think anything like mismanagement. I use that as an example, in terms of integrity, I was just being really thorough with my work. As a black person in leadership sometimes people see us, and they think we're not strategic.

When I asked Abeba whether she had to do anything different than her American counterparts or get special training to gain promotion, she answered:

Having grown up here, even as somebody who came when I was four, I realized that I had to work harder. I believe as an immigrant in leadership. You're not only dealing with racism, but you're also dealing with that dynamic between you and African Americans as well, unfortunately, but it's a very real thing.

After all of the adjustments and learning processes Abeba underwent, her advice to incoming immigrants who want to be successful in American Organizations is to firstly take advantage of attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

To be completely honest I would have gone to a HBCU in terms of my education. I think there just seems to be a very rich culture, a very rich community that you can develop for yourself from being in that type of environment. So, I think that's something I would have done from the onset. I would advise that when you come to this country, come with a very open mind. When people say this is the land of

opportunity, it definitely is. You don't have to limit yourself. I mean, depending on your age and kind of where you are, I know that makes a difference but don't limit yourself. Do a lot of investigating, a lot of research, talk to people who are in different career fields that you know and get a sense of what you think you can do to be fulfilled in your job. I will say definitely ask questions and do not limit yourself, because there's a lot of opportunities available here. Especially now!

### ***Immigrant Interview 7 Summary – Andrew***

Andrew immigrated to the United States from Africa in 1999. Originally, he was located in Philadelphia, but after 6 months he moved to Chicago to attend college. As an undergrad, he studied computer information systems and business. After earning his B.S. degree, he moved to Minneapolis to attend graduate school. He completed his MBA in 2009, and also completed a second Master's degree in Accounting and Financial Management. In Minneapolis, he began work at a mortgage lending company, where he worked for 9 years and received two promotions during his tenure. In 2016, he left the mortgage company and joined an accounting and investment consulting firm as an accountant and management consultant. During this time, Andrew pursued and completed his Doctorate in Business Administration. Subsequently, he formed a real estate investment firm where he has worked as an accountant and investment consultant, and as a manager.

He attributed his early professional success and ability to gain promotions to his willingness to work hard. In describing why, he believed he was promoted, he said: "At the mortgage company, I was promoted as a Lead and then Manager because of my hard



work and diligence and willingness to take on tasks that many people are not willing to take on.”

He also described several interpersonal skills and personal characteristics that he felt were related to his ability to be successful:

As a leader, you must be able to listen. You have to be willing to learn and be willing to be patient. One of the things that really helped me was trying to be very, very humble. Think on your feet and be willing to accept change.

Specifically at the mortgage company, things were changing all the time and many people were not willing to accept change and not willing to take on tasks that were difficult to do. I was always willing to do that.

Andrew did not attribute all of his success to his traits, skills, and desire to learn. In addition to pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees, he also stressed the importance of completing company training programs and the advantage and benefit of finding good mentors:

If you want to stay in this nation, you need to have mentors. Look for people who have succeeded in certain areas and be willing to learn from them. So, I had mentors at both the mortgage company and the investment consulting firm. Even now, I have a mentor in the real estate field.

When asked if he thought he had to do things differently than his American counterparts in order to achieve success, he again stressed the importance of working hard and remaining humble. He said:

You need to do more than is required... That really helped me; and be people-oriented; be willing to work with people. Don't think that you are more important

than others...or that your culture is better than other peoples' culture. Be willing to adapt and be willing to solve problems, not escalate them. Those things helped me a lot.

He further discussed the importance of being responsible, accountable, and trustworthy:

You've got to be accountable if you're a leader. And you've got to be a person, a man of your word. If you say something you have to do it. So, you can't say something and then do something else. You have to be trustworthy.

Andrew identified various challenges he faced as an immigrant, particularly problems with understanding the English language and racism. He acknowledged that when he took a job at a fast-food restaurant, he had difficulty understanding customer's orders, and had ask to be re-assigned to a non-customer job working in the kitchen. In commenting on the way, he experienced racism, he said:

Yeah, racism is real. Those things were things that I experienced. Some of the questions I was asked were very ignorant – like: 'Did you wear clothes in Africa?' Some would be very sarcastic, and you have to be very patient, or you could become very agitated and say things you might regret.

When asked about the process of adjusting to the U.S. and its culture, Andrew shared that he feels that he is now fully adjusted and comfortable in the United States saying: "I've been in this country for a very long time so I would say yes, I'm fully adjusted." Nonetheless, he described his adjustment process as taking some time during which he received a lot of help, especially from people who became his friends:

It was a process. Adjusting took some time, but because of the type of person I am, I adjusted very well. I'm a Christian, and I had the opportunity to meet a lot of Christians at college that were actually very kind and generous to me. I lived with a family, a white family that were Christians too...It took some time, like learning the food. I was not used to the food. I went to school, and I wanted to study computer science, but I didn't know how to type. So, it took me many, many hours. I went the extra mile to just come to where I am today so, those things were challenging...I made a lot of good friends. They helped me. I was willing to learn, I was humbled—not offended.

Finally, Andrew was asked what advice he had for incoming immigrants, and he stressed the importance having a strong desire to learn as well as the value of education, saying:

Many come here, and they are not willing to learn, not willing to learn a trade, or learn anything. They come here and they are focused on making money. That should not be your first priority. Your first priority is for you to gain some kind of skills or some kind of education and then you build from that and then life becomes a lot easier.

### ***Immigrant Interview 8 Summary – Stanley***

Stanley is originally from Africa where he obtained his undergraduate degree in Business Administration. He worked and taught in his home country before immigrating to the United States to pursue graduate studies. While in the United States, Stanley obtained a Master's degree in Business Administration, moved to Minnesota and was able to acquire a job where he rose from an entry level accounting position to the head of

the finance department. He served with distinction in that position until retirement. His responsibilities were enormous. He managed the organization's entire budget with integrity, transparency, accountability, and attention to detail. When asked how he was able to accomplish such enormous responsibilities, he explained:

Honesty, transparency, and attention to details are key. For me, attention to detail gives you the biggest success. People who know me know that I carry a to do list every day. When things are due, and not submitted on time, there are consequences and that is very important. You must have honesty, transparency, and listening skills to move the agenda forward. You know if you don't have the answer for it; just say it and continue to work on it. You must also have the openness to always learn from people who have experience and contributed before you. If you do that, you will overcome any barrier that comes your way.

Seeking promotion requires preparedness and good relationships. Stanley knew to gain promotion and be successful in that position, he had to acquire certain trainings and skills. During the interview, Stanley explained that you must be able to differentiate yourself in the workplace by initiating special trainings that are not available at the time. He also spoke briefly about relationship building. He commented:

I usually initiated trainings that I heard of from friends, coworkers, and external partners. I have gone to so many trainings both locally and nationally. Most often, I sought out the trainings. The organization had a policy of encouraging everyone to look for training in their area of expertise. I had to look for the ones that I wanted to participate in and make a presentation to my boss. It also goes back to

your relationship with your supervisor or immediate report. That is another possibility for growth.

Stanley's ability to build relationships, seek mentorship, learn the organization culture, and be flexible helped him become visible throughout the organization and accelerate his promotion process.

I have been fortunate to have great supervisors, bosses, and remarks from my committee members. There were also my mentors. Getting the right mentorship is very, very good in terms of how you make presentations. Report compilation, timeliness, accuracy, completeness, and your rapport with your supervisor are all important. Knowing the expectations of your supervisor, flexibility with your supervisor, and making available the reports he or she needs on time. The key components are to be available and flexible to with supervisor. Also, know the organization culture, be a team player and have a supportive role on the team. That's how you really get noticed.

There was some important skills Stanley had to learn apart from having his personal characteristics. He emphasized acquiring listening skills during our interview:

The key things I learned were listen more, talk less, and take initiative. Don't be shy in the group meetings. I know you have a lot of ideas to contribute just like everyone. That is one of the key things that made me who I am. My organization model was asset based. From the beginning, when I started, it said everybody has potential, everybody has something to contribute to enrich the discussion. So, in a meeting room, don't be reserved to speak up respectfully and follow the agenda sequence, but listening more is very important. That's what I did up to this point.

Stay focused, I think those qualities have helped me in getting promotions year after year.

After gaining promotion, one needs to stay focused on the position you've being promoted to and the direction of the organization. Your current performance also determines subsequent promotions. Stanley succeeded by following a process: "I think mastering your job, updating yourself with continuous readings relevant to your field, knowing what's going on in the ecosystem, and being current with information is very important. Update yourself on a regular basis."

Stanley also faced other challenges like racism but overcame it by being respectful and communicating his feelings to the appropriate authority.

I was not immune to racism. I think for some of them to be honest, I would just say in a respectful way that the comment you made is not appropriate. I remember one time there was an auditor commenting differently on my work. I had to report him to the auditing firm and asked them to change him. We also did cultural sensitivity training at my organization. We used to go and visit a certain university to learn about cultural sensitivities in the workplace and how that fits in with the customers we served. To be honest, you should speak up in a respectful way, to challenge the status quo if you see people being treated differently.

Stanley had some advice for incoming immigrants seeking promotions in American organizations. Looking back on his experience, he had this to say:

Develop teamwork in the workplace. Know your team, their culture, and the perspective they come from. These are critical in building social capital. I call it social capital. Getting along with people is very, very important. I mean

developing that talent to get along. Getting along with people requires a kind temperament to investigate things from different perspectives. Transparency, honesty, and I would also add, continuous improvement; either through readings, seeking opportunities, or having a mentor, all are key to getting promotion. Some immigrants who come from high positions in their respective governments or respective countries, are in for a cultural shock when they come here. It's a totally different story. There is a loss of privilege. It's really a matter of time. They need to concentrate and look into the future and not the past, get adjusted to the system and seek help from your fellow coworkers. Those are very, very important.

#### ***Immigrant Interview 9 Summary – Bandile***

Bandile, my ninth interviewee, is an immigrant from Africa who has been living in the United States for approximately 20 years. Bandile has a very lengthy background in Audit and Financial Analysis. He has worked extensively in the field of Finance and Accounting for at least twenty-five years. Bandile has an MBA in Finance and a Master's degree in Leadership and Public Policy. He immigrated to the United States for two reasons, to improve his standard of living and attend graduate school. The deteriorating economic and security situations in his home country did not provide any prospect for a successful life. Bandile felt his only path to a brighter future for himself and his family was for him to immigrate to the United States. His personal desire first and foremost was to pursue graduate studies in the United States. Both of his master's degrees were obtained in the United States.

He is currently the Chief Financial Officer for one of the largest independently owned meat processing and distribution plants in the mid-west. Bandile has oversight of the entire accounting and finance department. He has held this position for at least 10 years. Prior to that, he was a senior manager in the same company. He has worked at this company for 17 years.

Bandile credits his achievements and success to the grace of God and his personal growth. According to Bandile, his promotion process started when he began to assume leadership roles. His theory of leadership is to earn the trust of others. By gaining trust you begin to command the respect of others. He also believes that one must be prepared to perform whatever task they are given and be willing to work in a collaborative setting. This is how he described his concept of leadership:

In this environment, there are some basic things you must demonstrate. You must show leadership, and you must earn the respect of others. People must see you and be able to listen to you and accept whatever you offer them. Whether it's advice, suggestions, or direction; it all starts by earning the respect of others. I also think it's based on how you present yourself, how you prepare for whatever task lies before you, and how you work with your fellow teammates. People also watch how you respond to those who are placed above you, and how you deliver what is expected of you. Once people can listen to you, they will be willing to follow you, and this is when your leadership journey begins.

There is also more to being a leader than just presenting yourself in a particular way. He stressed how relationship building and listening skills are paramount in any collaboration, especially in a team setting:



For someone to listen to you, you must first listen to them. It all starts from you having the skill of listening to people. When you learn to listen to people, it's very easy for them to listen to you. That's where the relationship develops, that's where the trust begins to build up. That is where the respect comes in. It all starts with you being a very active listener. Listening to people, being able to deliver what is expected and building relationship are skills you must demonstrate for leadership positions. In the United States there is a lot of collaboration. To work in a group environment, people must listen to one another.

There were other personal traits and characteristics that Bandile utilized during his employment and promotion journey here in the United States. He spoke lengthily about loyalty, trust, self-empowerment, and the empowerment of others. He described himself as a very loyal person and felt even more gratified when he was praised for his trustworthiness by one of his bosses.

I always believe in this saying that 'if you are trusted and you prove yourself trustworthy with little things, larger things will be entrusted to you.' It has always been something that I've cultivated and maintained as a character trait. One of my bosses at one time said to me 'Bandile, I can trust you with my life.' That was gratifying for me to hear. The other thing is loyalty. I've been working with this company for 17 years. Prior to that, I worked for another company for 5 years. I'm loyal to institutions or individuals who I work with. Another thing is the desire to want to be better or make progress. People see that too and it projects you as a leader because you always try to see how to improve or make things better. I always want to make myself better, or make people better, or to make the

environment better. I always want to move from one stage to the next in terms of improvement. One final trait which I consider to be very important is self-empowerment or the empowerment of others. Whenever someone ask to help them to do a task for them, I teach them how to do it so that they are empowered to do things for themselves.

Bandile discussed how prepared one must be for leadership. In his case, he did a lot of preparations. He took on a lot of initiatives and self-trainings that were not offered in his field of study. He was so interested in self-improvement that he taught himself how to use the numbers keyboard. He knew that working in accounting would require using the alpha numeric keypad to be effective and efficient, so he took on typing classes to gain typing speed. He said:

I always wanted to be better. From the onset even before coming to the U.S., I always had the mindset that I wanted to come to the U.S. and obtain an American education. I put a lot of planning into it. The job I took coming right out of college was in public accounting. It did not pay much, but you gain a lot of strength as an accountant. You develop your skills. You learn accounting better when you go into public accounting. I also did little things like going to typing school. You don't usually find accountants going to typing school, but I wanted my reports to be exceptional. It was the preparation from the beginning and when I got into the job itself, I just had the determination that I wanted to succeed. I wasn't satisfied. I kept studying and practicing and researching. I think it's the drive, and preparation that helped me get those promotions.

Bandile did not gain success by relying on his own capabilities. He aligned himself with people of like minds and it paid off. They saw his drive for wanting to succeed so they took him under their tutelage and mentored him. He took advantage of those opportunities:

I had two mentors that I can always look back on. One of them happened to be a CPA and the owner of the firm that I worked for few years after coming out of college. He was very smart; he knew accounting very well and he just set me up for success. He showed me how to write reports, and he sent a few of us for executive training where we learned Microsoft Suites, Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Access, etc. He was the first person who I can look back on as someone who helped me in terms of mentoring. My other mentor was also my immediate boss at another firm. He was also CPA and as soon as he knew of my desire to learn, he began mentoring me. He gave me lessons and took me under his wings. He impacted my life. Those things I would say give me a broad perspective of what working in the U.S. environment is like.

There were other challenges that Bandile had to deal with. He recalled dealing with racism in the work environment but was able to handle it well:

I have dealt with racism. It's a common thing in the environment that we find ourselves, especially those of us who are immigrants. One of the common ways in which it is shown is when you get a call directed to you as the reference person. As soon as you begin to speak, the person on the other line would say 'oh, I wanted to talk to somebody about this. Are you that person or can you direct me to the person whom I should be talking to?' You instantly realize that it's because

of your accent and you don't sound American. In other words, you could not be the person they should be talking to about a very important request. Another way is when you're talking to a customer, or to anyone, and you can tell by the way the person responds to you. They are condescending in their remarks. They do not take you seriously. My whole mindset surrounding racist behavior is to assume the one being racist is ignorant or oblivious; because if the person knew better, they wouldn't treat people poorly based on their color or ethnicity. You shouldn't be judging people on those bases.

Adjustment into the American system was very difficult for Bandile. He had many demands competing for his time. He was a student, an employee, a husband, and a spouse. This is Bandile's experience:

It was very difficult, and I know many people like me who immigrated to the U.S. found adjusting to be very tough. The environment was completely different. Additionally, I came with a family. Trying to support my family, attend classes, and maintain a full-time job all at the same time was challenging. I had a job, a full-time job, and it wasn't just any job. It's a job that I wanted to succeed in. All those things made adjustment very challenging.

I asked if he had any advice for incoming immigrants who wanted to be successful in American organizations. This was his advice:

The first thing I would say is, talk to people who have been in the United States and American organizations for a while. Spend some time with them. Get to know the expectations, challenges, and opportunities—then prepare yourself. As I mentioned earlier, you've got to prepare. I would tell anyone who wants to

immigrate to the U.S. and work as an accountant in finance, to prepare well. You've got to know your accounting well. You may not have learned all of it in school or completed all of the chapters in your accounting programs and understood everything well, but you can find other ways to practice. For example, you could find a part-time teaching position. In that way, those chapters that you didn't understand very well while in school, you will now have the opportunity to study them and teach. This will improve your accounting skills. Another way to perfect your accounting skill is to find a job in public accounting. That is another area you get exposed to a lot of accounting practices. Don't rely on the things you learned in school. The only way you can prepare yourself is by talking to people who've already been there and had those experiences. I think those are the two major things that I would advise to anyone just coming into the U.S. as an immigrant.

***Immigrant Interview 10 Summary – Ezra***

Ezra was my final interviewee for the Immigrant Workers category. He immigrated from Africa to the United States in 2000 for academic and professional advancement. Ezra completed his undergraduate studies in Africa in the area of Accounting and Business Management. He also worked for several major banks and public accounting firms in Africa before coming to the United States. While in the U.S., Ezra worked in both private financial banking sector and government institutions as an internal auditor. He later returned to academia and obtained a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) in Corporate Finance. Ezra currently serves as a vice president and consultant at a prestigious financial banking institution in the Midwest.

Ezra's promotion process in the United States has not been as fast as he would have liked it to be. Credentials from Africa take a longer time to validate or authenticate. He has been patient and used the waiting period to prepare himself academically. When I asked Ezra what his promotion process has been like in the United States, this was his response.

I began my employment with a financial service company. When you come to this part of the world from our part of the world, your education and your recommendations take a lot of time and effort to validate compared to the people you are competing with. When I entered this company, I had actually gone for a position to answer the phone and do collections. Luckily for me, the older guy I interviewed with reviewed my resume and was shocked. He said to me 'we are not looking for you. We are only looking for people just to answer the phone.' He quickly said 'there are people here who review customers' credit cards when they are delinquent and send the customer account to collection. Collection agencies pay them off. You will have to calculate their commission and then we write a check and pay them for the week or for the month. Those people don't answer the phone. That might be a bit within your range. I can hire you for that position if you would prefer it. The rule here is, if you stay with the company for one year, you can move to any position in the company.' That is how I began my employment journey.

Ezra was patient and worked diligently hoping that he would complete a year and then become qualified to move upward in the company. He did and finally decided to test

the system as he was told that he could apply for other positions upon completion of a year:

Only the older guy who interviewed me initially knew my qualifications. After a year, I took my resume to the lady who was my current boss. I asked if it was okay for me to begin applying for other positions and she was surprised. She said ‘wow, you have all of these qualifications and you’ve just been sitting here every day of the week?’ She said to me, ‘if you apply for any job and they ask me I’ll speak on your behalf.’ That was when I applied to the Corporate Headquarters and was accepted as a Staff Accountant. I stayed there for about two to three years and then I applied for an internal audit position at the County level. I did a series of interviews and got the job. I stayed at that job for approximately six or seven years before moving to my current company.

Ezra has been successful in attaining several leadership roles, so I asked him what important skills he had that helped propel him forwards. He relayed how important it was to have actual technical skills in whatever position you are working in.

When I think about the promotion from Senior Auditor at my current company to the other leadership positions, the main criteria that led me to those positions was my actual technical auditing skills. There was a time the audit manager gave me an assignment to do. I did it so well that when I provided him with the result, he was very impressed and could not believe that I was just a Senior Auditor. On a Friday evening before leaving, he told me there was an Audit Leader position open and he wanted for me to apply for it. He said to me, ‘I’m not asking you to think about it. I’m asking you to apply for it. As far as I see it, you are doing

better than the people who are in this position with me, so you need you to apply.’

I applied and got promoted to an Audit Leader.

Ezra also had to display some personal traits and characteristics to help him gain promotions. He went above and beyond and helped other team members who were lagging behind to succeed so that the entire team could win in the end. He sought collective victory for the entire team. I asked Ezra what were some important traits or characteristics he had to display to gain those promotions. He said:

One of them is attention to detail. Don't be satisfied with stopping at the minimum, pay attention to detail and go beyond what's evidently right there so the job is done in a better way. Listen for the details and help other team members that are with you but not as equally technically capable. On the other hand, they may be new to their rules, or they may come from a slightly different background than yours.

As an immigrant, Ezra had to do things differently than his American counterparts to gain promotion. He had to work hard and perform at the highest level to prove that he was capable.

As an immigrant in competition with your normal American counterparts, the main thing you have to do is work hard by proving that you are highly capable. You need to prove your capabilities at all times. I've been here more than twenty years and what I've seen in this society is people talk more than they do the actual work. There should be certain things that separate you when it comes actual performance and helping the organization become successful. Your bosses might prefer people who are like them if it's just the normal everyday work that everybody does most of the time. They consider immigrants as being outsiders. To succeed as an immigrant in any



American organization, you have to prove that you can do it better than the other people—especially for those of us who were already grown before we came to this country and not like the kids who came here from a very young age or were born here; you can hardly tell that they're different; but for immigrants like me, who still have our home accent that hasn't changed, that's the only way you can get to the next level.

Ezra also had special training and mentorship that helped him along the way. In his previous job at the county level, he was privileged to benefit from trainings that he later utilized at his current company. This knowledge was a great help to both Ezra and his team:

When I was at the county level, I worked in the auditing department and one of our functions was data analysis. My team members instantly recognized my exceptional skills in Excel compared to others. When it became time for the county to begin a credit card project, they needed other departments for checks and balances to ensure that no one violates the rules. At the end of the month, we would collect all the credit card transactions, from the issuing company and analyze them by utilizing Excel. My manager at the time sent me along with another person to a data analysis training for two weeks. At my current company, there are special group set aside to do that sort of job. As a regular auditor, I was able to help my audit team conduct large data analysis before it got to the specialists. This was due to the training I had at the county level.

Additionally, Ezra discussed his mentorship journey and how he selected his mentors:

I selected my current mentor at my current company due to his 25 years of experience in auditing, his knowledge surrounding the department and the company's culture and the fact that he was the most technically inclined employee in the department. Even though he was the most experienced, he wasn't in a senior level position, and he was humble. We met on a on a weekly basis. In those meetings he taught me how to move forward in the company and the profession. He introduced me to industry training, or any training that would propel me. He helped me learned the rules.

Ezra again emphasized patience as his most valuable personal trait. He stressed that immigrants must have patience to move forward in American organizations.

You must have patience. As immigrants you must be steadfast. Opportunities for getting to the next level for immigrants than their American counterparts. They tell you that you all are being considered equal, but I know, that's not the reality. It's only in theory. In my experience some of my managers weren't qualified for the positions they held, but they were my bosses. It was clear that I could have been their boss, but it wasn't the case. You must have patience as an immigrant otherwise you'll easily get frustrated.

Ezra believes that racism is the reason for him being at his current position. Had he not been an immigrant, he believes he would have been at a much higher level. This is how Ezra described his experience:

I've experienced racism. I am at my current level because I am an immigrant. If I were a Caucasian American; I would have been two levels higher. They try to frustrate you so that's why I say you must have patience. Another option is to pay

attention to the actual technical work and, at the same time, consider other opportunities. As an immigrant if you are easily discouraged, then you will get discouraged sooner rather than later. You've got to have a lot of patience to grow in American organizations.

Regardless of Ezra's knowledge and extensive background in accounting, he faced difficulties in terminology; however, the principles remained the same. Ezra narrated that he has adjusted considerably but, being overlooked or ignored is an adjustment he has not gotten used to. He believes as an immigrant, the odds will always be against you.

After more than 20 years in the United States, I have adjusted mentally. I trust what I know, and I know what I can do, but I also know that the odds are always against me. Let me give you one example: I moved from Internal Audit to a part of the company called Capital Markets. When I got there, there were several incomplete projects. The senior manager wanted those projects completed but employees working on those projects were struggling. They did not understand the technology fully to complete the project. When I got there, I was asked to lead the project. The project was successful. Based on its positive result, she took it to the director, who later approved our department to use the technology. There was an interview set up later for someone to officially lead the project. When we got to the interview, one manager showed up 8 minutes into a 30-minute interview. She showed up and asked me only two questions. In the end the position was given to another woman—after I had already successfully implemented the pilot project.

Ezra has one regret and thinks if he had to do things differently, he would have acquired his education earlier and combine that with his technical skills. He feels this would have eliminated the majority of the lower positions he occupied when he started his employment journey.

The legalization of my status delayed my career growth within the United States. I was temporarily allowed to reside with the U.S., and I had to pay out of pocket to obtain an education because I didn't qualify for federal loans. That took me a longer time to complete my studies. Had I gone to school directly and gotten the degrees I wanted, I wouldn't have applied for those smaller positions. I would have begun at a level commensurate to my academic qualification. That would have accelerated my growth a lot faster. I did not enroll until 10 years later after entering the United States. That slowed down a lot of things for me. All things being equal, I would have done that differently.

Ezra had some final advice for incoming immigrants who want to be successful in American organizations:

Number one is patience. I'll give you a sports analogy. Whenever you are playing against a team that already knows how you play, they will be prepared to attack you. Similarly, those organizations you are working with already know that you are an immigrant from the other side and assume you are not prepared enough for the task. Eventually, they're going to discriminate against you because of those reasons. Blacks who came to the U.S. 400 years ago faced this same problem. You've got to compartmentalize and know that you are going to be discriminated against. Do not let it bother you; if it does, you're not going to move as fast as

you would like to. Utilize your technical skills and be able to execute and you will be okay. Remember, they already place you at a different level when it comes to who's going to lead a group.

## **Summaries of Interviews with Hiring Managers**

### ***Manager Interview 1 Summary – Bendt***

Bendt was my first interviewee for the category of Hiring Managers. He was born to immigrant parents who immigrated to United States from Eastern and Northern Europe. Both of his parents met in a refugee camp in Germany, got married, and came to the United States for security purposes.

Bendt has a Master's degree in Public Affairs (MPA) from the Humphrey Institute of the University of Minnesota. He is the founder and president of a major nonprofit in Minnesota which combined the approaches of micro-enterprise and Community Development Corporation (CDC) industries in a program consisting of inner-city entrepreneur training, lending and on-going support, and real estate development. Bendt's career and work trajectory has placed him in positions where he had to make major hiring decisions that involved immigrants. When asked what specific trait or skill he looks for when hiring immigrants, Bendt stated:

Due to the uniqueness of my background, I am much more aware than most of the people I grew up around. Just because someone has a hard time speaking English while having a simple conversation doesn't mean anything about them. It certainly doesn't mean that they're uneducated or stupid or incapable. I know this because my father was an attorney in eastern Europe prior to the war. He came to the United States and worked in a steel mill but couldn't speak a word of English

even though he knew seven other languages and had a PhD in law. Whenever I have the opportunity to meet someone who's an immigrant and struggles with English, I don't have the same reaction that people might have if they didn't grow up with that type of understanding. This is also similar to the culture. I grew up in multiple cultures, therefore, I look for a person who knows what their interest in life is. I look at immigrants as people and what they want to contribute to our community, not just their own family, but to our broader community. I just want to learn from them. I want to know what kinds of skills, talents, or passions they have and how they can contribute.

I also wanted to find what type of skills or traits were lacking in immigrant workers compared to U.S. born citizens. In Bendt's experience, many immigrants did not have adequate knowledge about the American history or how things operate within the United States.

Immigrants lack the knowledge or history of America. They bring with them the history of their home country and do not understand how things work in the U.S. due to the history here. For example, the history of the 35W freeway that wiped out the black neighborhood called Rondo, redlining the racial covenants, and the treatment of blacks and immigrants over the centuries, are all lost to a typical immigrant. They do not know the history. When we work with them one-on-one, it's really important to me that everybody knows this kind of history. Immigrant folks don't have that history from their own life. They have a different history.

In Bendt's experience, I wanted to know what was the "tie breaker," if any, whenever the hiring process came down to an immigrant and a U.S. born citizen. He said:

A tie breaker implies that they were completely equal, however one was an immigrant, and the other wasn't. The answer is cultural connection to the people we work with. Whenever we're working heavily within the Hmong community, and I have an applicant who is Hmong and another applicant who isn't, that would certainly be an advantage on top of all their other qualities. The same goes for Latino Spanish speaking, or Somali, Oromo, European, or African American. Being a part of the culture and history and community that we work with is a huge advantage for that applicant.

Immigrants make many adjustments regarding communication, language, or living conditions on a daily basis. I asked Bendt if there is a conscious effort to gauge the level of adjustment immigrant workers make and he replied:

It is frankly a form of training for people in the United States to have to learn. Some of these cultures that come to the United States have a formality that Americans don't have. Immigrant cultures have a formality during their initial meetings with you. They respect their elders and even carry themselves differently. There's a particular way of addressing a person, a way of speaking, dressing, a way of letting a person finish their thought, leave a little pause, and then start talking. It's all a kind of a formality, but that is not part of the blue-collar culture here in America. You can easily tell an immigrant from a nonimmigrant. I look for people that are aware enough about these things that they can learn and respect that there are these different styles, and you should be multicultural in that sense.

Lastly, immigrants struggle in asking for help. I don't know if that's an immigrant thing but a lot of people, whenever they're promoted and for whatever reason don't like to ask for help. They are disappointed whenever they can't get everything done. This is certainly widespread amongst immigrants. It might be their culture or their personal experience.

### ***Manager Interview 2 Summary – Olivia***

Olivia is a U.S. citizen who has lived in the United States for her entire career and life. She also has an extensive experience in hiring immigrants and the hiring process as a whole. She has had the opportunity of working in several U.S. companies that are global and has interacted with the global community. Olivia has held several high-profile positions like V.P. for Human Capital, V.P. for Talent Acquisition, and Senior Director for HR Enterprises. These experiences make her uniquely qualified for this study. In terms of her academic background, Olivia has a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Business Management with HR emphasis, and a Master of Business Administration (MBA), with HR emphasis. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate.

In Olivia's multiple roles, there were times she had to make hiring decisions. I asked Olivia what specific traits or skills she looked for in a potential immigrant worker. This was Olivia's experience.

For all workers, there are key traits that are important to me. There are personal traits around leadership that are consistent for everybody. Every company I've worked for has been a big national organization with 100 plus thousand employees. They're big organizations, where initiative is really important. You can't just wait to be told what to do when you are learning how to navigate a



complex large organization. You must be curious and have the initiative to learn. Building partnership is another trait. You must learn to build connections and partnerships to get things done. Lastly, I look for continuous improvement—being able to connect the dots and learn. I would say, have a growth mindset. My experience with immigrant workers is they tend to do really well in those areas because they know they are coming to a new country, and they have to learn a lot. I don't change my criteria of what I'm looking for. Those are the key things that I'm looking for from all candidates.

What did Olivia find lacking in immigrant workers? Did they fit the profile she just narrated? She said:

There are two things that I feel are lacking. I would not necessarily say that they're at a disadvantage but at times, there is a language challenge. There could be communication or language barriers. When English is not their primary language and the organization that is not bilingual or multilingual at times, it becomes harder for them. They have to adapt to ensure that there aren't any communication barriers that sometimes could be an opportunity. Now an immigrant who has always had English as their second language or first language do not have this issue. They may have a skill gap which can be worked on. The other part is cultural context and understanding. If you grew up in one country and you're working in a primarily based U.S. company that's not global, you may not have all the cultural understanding on some of the nuances. I've also observed that, with folks within the United States-East coast versus West coast, sometimes there are cultural nuances.

There are employees who are very successful in gaining yearly promotion while others are not. Is this true for immigrant workers? Whenever the promotion process came down to an immigrant and a U.S. citizen, was there any specific criteria that set them apart? Olivia looked for certain criteria not specifically for immigrant workers but employees in general. Here is her experience.

I usually look for the most qualified of them. The best candidate would be the one who demonstrates those three or four kinds of personal behaviors—having the initiative, being adaptable, and demonstrating a growth mindset, and the person who cares deeply about partnerships and building connections. These would be the tie breaker. Immigrants have a wealth of experience as it relates to world view.

Olivia also recognizes that immigrants have different culture and different perspective on a variety of issues. She thinks this is an advantage for immigrants. This is her perspective on immigrants' diverse backgrounds:

When one thinks about the dynamics in the world today around diversity and inclusion and the business value it creates when you have diversity on your team, I think that is an advantage if you have different perspectives on your team. You have a global perspective and many organizations like mine, are a global company. We're in 150 countries. We have just as many employees outside of the U.S. as we do within the U.S., therefore it's important for us to bring the value of having a diverse team to live through that. Immigrants bring new and different perspectives.

Many of the immigrants that I've worked with have come from not ideal living environments. There were circumstances of poverty and war where they had to fight for their lives, and so they leave the country and those unfortunate situations. What I have found is this type of experience has made them resilient and adaptable. They had to endure difficult circumstances in their lives as a result, they're pretty good at navigating difficult situations in the work environment because they're just naturally more resilient and adaptable.

Working in the United States requires immigrant workers to meet U.S. compliance regulations. Olivia stated that all positions require those compliance regulations however, organizations are only able to sponsor certain roles which require additional information. Olivia elaborated:

We ask all candidates if they are eligible to know work in the U.S. with or without sponsorship. We are legally required to ask of all candidates. Now, if they are immigrants and require sponsorship, then that would be something we might go deeper into. There are some roles that we are able to provide sponsorship for and others we can't.

Olivia's final advice for immigrant workers seeking promotion in American organizations was building connections and networking. She felt these were important skills potential immigrant workers needed.

I think, building a connection and networking are important. You also should go through the stages of identifying the roles and experiences you want to have, and then building the connections with people in organizations that you desire to be in. Get your foot in the door and then begin to build connections. I think once

you're in the organization, you should begin demonstrating that growth mindset and become curious and bold. Learning about the organization, leaning in, and doing. I encourage everyone to do this, but I think especially for someone who's an immigrant worker, take time to make sure you understand the cultural context, get a mentor that can help you navigate. Whether it's just understanding new nuances of the United States or the organization that you're a part of.

### ***Manager Interview 3 Summary – Charlotte***

Charlotte was the third interviewee for the category of Hiring Managers. Charlotte was born and raised in the United States and is a native of Minnesota. She has vast experience in the hiring process. Charlotte is employed with a non-business entity that is involved with helping entrepreneurs grow and develop their businesses. She has been with this organization for the past 24 years and has served in several capacities ranging from responsibilities relative to employees, teams, technology, and back-office infrastructure of the organization. Charlotte currently serves as the Chief Administrative Officer of her current company. She is a high school graduate with some college level education.

Charlotte wears many hats. She has been involved with many employment interviews and the promotion processes. Her organization is frequently looking for candidates who have a connection to its mission, vision, and a global mindset.

When I asked Charlotte what trait or skill an immigrant worker needs to have for employment with an American organization, she stated that it was extremely important for immigrants to do their research and have substantial information about the organization they were interested in. This was Charlotte's response:

This is not just for immigrants generally, what I specifically look for during the hiring process is language skills. Whether Africans, or Mexicans, or Asians. We work with a lot of different cultures and different ethnicities; therefore, I'm always looking for language compatibility. I also look for somebody who is entrepreneurial and has a connection to our mission, work, and our clients.

Charlotte's observation during her many years of interacting with immigrants included barriers immigrants faced compared to U.S. born citizens—English skills, work authorization, confidence, and lack of knowledge surrounding the American system.

Sometimes language is a huge barrier—specifically, lack of English skills. There is also an issue of having the authorization to work in the United States, visa status, and mostly confidence. It's confidence and a lack of knowledge of the way business is run in the United States. That's a huge barrier for immigrant workers.

Whenever the hiring or promotion process came down to an immigrant worker and a U.S. born citizen, did Charlotte have a tie breaker? She did not speak specifically to an immigrant worker and a U.S. born citizen rather, she spoke to hiring and promotion in general:

I haven't had that experience, but you know just thinking about any position here or job here in which we were looking to promote somebody, I think the tie breaker regardless of their citizenship or immigration status would be their ability to communicate and build relationships. It comes down to that.

On the issue of cultural adjustment, Charlotte had an in-depth knowledge on how immigrants struggle to adjust to the American culture and systems. I asked Charlotte if

she makes a conscious effort to gauge the level of adjustment immigrants make and this was her experience.

I definitely try to understand the level of adjustments immigrant workers make.

Our clientele come to us to with a lot of barriers, and lot of challenges relative to exposure to the American business economy and the way things work. So, one of the reasons why immigrants have a huge disadvantage is due to language barriers.

They struggle to express themselves in a way that a non-immigrant would. My job as an interviewer is to look past that and to find ways in which I can connect so that they are comfortable with the story they're telling. Whenever I get a response from immigrants for a job I've posted, the first things I look for is the connection to our mission, our values, and our community. One intriguing thing I've found is immigrants have fantastic experience, and huge degrees, but are undervalued when they get to the U.S. They are not approved to work in their certified field. They have to go back and get educated all over. I get to see someone's resume who has been a college professor yet is applying for a receptionist job. That's heartbreaking to me. I always make an effort to speak with that person even if he/she is overqualified. I'm always curious to find out if that person would be satisfied in this level of position and I'm always stunned with their response. I have learned a lot from these interactions with people; I'd be so mad if I had to reinvent myself to work in another country. I am also amazed by their commitment and eagerness to fit in. They're grateful to come in and do a receptionist job while they're getting their degree all over again.

Additional advice to immigrant workers seeking promotion or employment from Charlotte was to first be qualified to work in the United States:

You know there's this whole thing we didn't talk too much about. There's the whole visa process system. It is expensive, a lot of work, and risky for the employer because there's no guarantee after doing everything you're supposed to do, that that person will actually get their citizenship. It's just a big crapshoot. We did it a couple times earlier on and when I think about it now, would I do it again? Now the U.S. hiring and immigration process is all so changed from when we did it the last time. Probably been 15 years or 10 years ago. I would guess it's even harder now and more confusing, but do you want to invest in helping this person who's here working on a visa? What happens if you fall in love with them and they are doing a fabulous job and now it's like do you even want to open that door? Do you want to open the door to start a relationship knowing that it's going to be a challenge down the road? That's a huge disadvantage for immigrants.

Charlotte's final comments for immigrant workers seeking promotion in American organizations involved confidence and self-awareness. She said:

Immigrants should have confidence and self-awareness. I mean reading the room and knowing your audience and their expectation. Learning the U.S. business style is also important. When I say learn more about U.S. style of business, I'm not talking about just being an employee, but what makes the American economy tick, and what's expected. What is interesting during interviews or just meeting somebody, is their story. How did they get here? What brought them here? It's always a fascinating story. The longer people are here the more fascinating the

story becomes. I don't like the word acclimate, but the more they learn about systems and processes is better for them.

#### ***Manager Interview 4 Summary – Emma***

Emma is a Minnesota native, and a U.S. born citizen. Emma has a Master's degree (MA) in Public Affairs from the University of Minnesota. She is currently a Senior Social Worker and a supervisor at her current place of employment.

In Emma's role, she has had to promote or hire deserving individuals many times. According to Emma, there are some unique qualities that she looks for during promotion or hiring in general. It is not specific to a potential immigrant worker but candidates in general. She stressed the need for technical skills, soft skills, and personal dynamics, among others:

I know you probably want me to speak specifically to the immigrant worker. It's very similar to all of the people that I interview. I look for technical skills, soft personal skills, professional etiquette, academic, and personal background. I like for all candidates to specifically share and demonstrate their personalities. It helps to see who they are, and how they would fit within my unit and with the people I supervise. I look for personality dynamics, compared to the families we serve, and what qualities, knowledge, or expertise they may have to share with.

With regards to technical skills, it's really about the systems that we utilize. I look to see if there is any knowledge around that. Not just Microsoft Word or Microsoft Office, but overall. Also important is their ability to drive initiative from start to finish. I'm also really interested in their knowledge of institutional systemic racism, as well as their own personal bias and awareness.



In Emma's experience, she did not find immigrant workers lacking in skills. She felt that there could be improvement in their technical skills specifically around the system they operate in specific industries. For Emma, it's not just learning the basic Microsoft Suite or other software; it's about being efficient and compliant with the software that is being used in a specific industry. Emma elaborated:

I haven't found anything specifically lacking in immigrants. I do wonder if there may not be enough years of experience to demonstrate and have that technical skill. It's the software, and the difficulty if you're not within our system and familiar with the different nuances of our own software. That definitely hurts. That could happen with immigrant workers, but because we are such a union, seniority-based organization, we have a lot of workers that are white so, we are trying to hire and promote immigrant workers to have a level playing field.

Whenever the hiring or promotion process came down to an immigrant worker and a U.S. born citizen, Emma was focused on experience, competence, and world view among many others. She was very specific in what she was looking for as a hiring manager or supervisor. For example, she said "Tiebreakers always go with worldview, education level, professional experience, language capacities, abilities, community perspectives and passion."

Potential immigrant workers may wonder if there was a chance that they held any edge over a U.S. born citizen when it came down to promotion or hiring. In Emma's experience, these are some of the areas that give a potential immigrant an edge.

From a personality perspective, I would say it's their worldview, compared to individualistic perspective as an American born. Their ability to potentially move

that from individualism to a more community focused dimension. I think we benefit from that, including my own unit. I do definitely look for someone who could supplement our own ideas, as well as community and language. Definitely those are the things I would love to hear more about in interviews. I love differences.

Emma's final comments and advice to potential immigrant workers were the following.

Talk about your compassion, highlight their interests in whatever job they're applying for, and demonstrate your ability to be productive. Be engaging, creative, and highlight what you can personally bring to the table. Also, emphasize resilience, toughness, and efficiency in answering questions.

#### ***Manager Interview 5 Summary – Liam***

Liam was my final interviewee in the category of hiring manager. He is a U.S. born citizen who grew up as a “military brat.” His stepdad was a Colonel in the Air Force, so they moved around constantly. Approximately every 3 years, his family moved to new location. He grew up in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and then New Jersey. He attended the University of Nebraska and studied Construction Management. Liam did not graduate in the construction field. He dropped out and later returned to study Business Administration. He is now a prospective graduate for an undergraduate degree (BA). Liam is employed with the Army Air Force Exchange Services as a Facility Manager. In his managerial capacity, Liam makes hiring and promotion decisions.

Most of the candidates Liam hires are required to stack the shelves or operate cash registers. In his experience, most of the immigrants he hires have a language challenge.

Learning day-to-day American English is difficult. However, he doesn't allow those shortcomings to impede their opportunity for employment. He believes those are quick fixes. He is focused on the best candidate whom he thinks can get the job done.

Basically, what I look for is the candidate who is best suited for position. Most of the people I hire will be stacking the shelves, working the cash registers, and interacting with the customers. Whoever is capable of doing these things will be the best choice. The one who is willing to work, put in time and have a strong work ethic is a possible candidate. I do not deny candidates for not understanding that a quarter is twenty-five cents.

Liam recognizes that immigrants have an edge compared to their American counterpart. They are driven and hardworking. Liam elaborated:

I think immigrant workers have an edge. They are more driven than their American counterparts. The U.S. born citizens believe that they don't have to work hard. The immigrant workers work harder because they want to provide for their families. They believe that in the United States, if you work hard enough, you can become whoever you want to be. You just have to work for it. They have a way stronger work ethic than U.S.-born employees.

Liam feels that immigrants have a strong drive for success compared to younger U.S.-born citizens. With that level of sensibility, immigrant workers will be able to thrive. He gives an example of his sister-in-law who is an immigrant:

I don't think there is anything lacking for immigrants to become successful. They already have the drive. The younger Americans just seem to lack that drive, but immigrant workers are driven. My sister-in-law got her degree then went on to get

her Master's degree. She is consistently pushing herself to be better. Her husband—my brother—and I; we are just happy to get college degrees. We are happy with the Bachelor's, but she constantly tells him to go for his Master's and 'don't settle at the bachelor level.'

Liam's final comment to potential immigrant workers who want to be successful in American organizations is to persevere and not feel discouraged. Immigrants who have stayed longer in the United States tend to become biased against newcomers according to Liam.

I hate to say this but, it's the bias that some immigrant workers have against their fellow immigrant workers. They can be from the same country and have bias against their fellow countrymen. Some put them down and try to steam roll them over to make themselves look better and the new people get discouraged.

## Chapter 5: Results

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the factors contributing to immigrant workers' success within American organizations. This process began with interviews of immigrant workers to gain their perspective on how they became successful or gained promotions within American organizations. For a balanced analysis, hiring managers were also interviewed to get their perspective of what criteria they consider when promoting immigrant workers.

### Immigrant Workers

There were 25 primary themes derived from the interviews with immigrant workers which were grouped into seven higher order themes as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Primary and Higher-Order Themes from Interviews with Immigrant Workers*

Primary Theme/Code	Interview(s) Where Theme Was Cited	Higher-Order Theme	
Honesty	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8	Personal Traits & Characteristics	
Open-Mindedness	2, 4, 5, 6, 7		
Integrity	3, 6, 7, 8		
Flexible and Adaptable	4, 5, 6, 8		
Accountability and Responsibility	3, 7, 8, 9		
Patience	2, 7, 10		
Confidence	3, 4, 6		
Humility	2, 7		
Task and Results-Oriented	2, 6, 9, 10		Achievement Oriented & Results Focused
Focused	3, 6, 7, 9		
Organizational Commitment and Loyalty	1, 6, 8, 9		
Attentive to Detail and Deadlines	1, 7, 8, 10		
Achievement-Oriented and Hardworking	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8		
Initiative and Persistence	2, 3, 7, 9		

Primary Theme/Code	Interview(s) Where Theme Was Cited	Higher-Order Theme	
Higher Education Skills Training Learning Orientation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 9, 10 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10	Desire for Learning & Development	
Teamwork and Collaboration Listening Skills Building Relationships Treating Others with Respect and Fairness	1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 2, 7, 8, 9 6, 8, 9 2, 3		Interpersonal Skills
Valuing Diversity Dealing with Racism	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10		
Learning English	1, 2, 4, 7, 10	English Proficiency	
Seek Mentoring and Coaching	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10	Mentoring & Coaching	

### *Personal Traits & Characteristics*

All 10 immigrant interviewees mentioned one or more personal traits or characteristics they believed were instrumental to their career success. As shown in Table 8, eight separate personal characteristics were mentioned by two or more interviewees.

*honesty* was mentioned most frequently by six interviewees, followed by *open-mindedness* which was cited by five. For example, Fatimah stated:

For myself, I think being honest and open-minded are two of the biggest things you need be successful here. I think honesty is a huge thing and we need to be honest and open to build trust among people especially in my role.

Similarly, Benedict remarked “Honesty is also very important to gain promotion.”

Benedict also stressed the importance of being open-minded. He said:

If you want to become successful in a team, you must understand that teamwork is very important, and you must respect other people. You must be able to

incorporate their ideas. You must be able to listen to them because if you are open minded, bring in their ideas, and work with them, you will become successful.

Kenji agrees that open-mindedness was a critically important trait, stating:

From all the layers that I've been exposed to, especially from being on the leadership team, or in leadership capacity, some of the very important strong aspects for me is a leader who is open minded – meaning that I take input and value other people's suggestions, ideas, or recommendations that come in from the team.

Several interviewees described the traits of *integrity* and *adaptability*. For example, in describing why he believed he had received promotions, Andrew stated “Be willing to adapt and be willing to solve problems, not escalate them. Those things helped me a lot.” Later in the interview he discussed the importance of integrity saying, “You've got to be a person of your word. If you say something you have to do it.” Abeba had a similar opinion on the importance of adaptability:

I showed that I was willing to be nimble and flexible and adaptive. It was clear that I was committed to the mission of the organization, because when you work in a nonprofit you don't just get to sit in your little silo environment.

Four traits or characteristics were mentioned by only two or three of the interviewees: *accountability & responsibility*, *patience*, *humility*, and *confidence*. Andrew stated that it was not good enough to just get the promotion, but rather be accountable for what you say and do. He said “You've got to be accountable if you're a leader. And you've got to be a person, a man of your word. If you say something you have to do it.” According to Stanley, once you have been promoted, the most responsible thing to do is

staying current in your role. This is how he thinks you would be able to do that: “I think mastering your job, updating yourself with continuous readings relevant to your field, knowing what's going on in the ecosystem, and being current with information is very important. Update yourself on a regular basis.” Bandile concurred that being responsible shows in your work and how you respond to authority. He said, “People also watch how you respond to those who are placed above you, and how you deliver what is expected of you.” Kenji also spoke about patience as a trait that helped him gain promotion: “One of the important traits I would say I hold as an individual is that I’m quite patient. You know—patience, patience, patience; and the willingness to learn.”

Andrew attributed his success to staying humble and working hard. He said “You need to do more than is required...That really helped me—and, be people-oriented, be willing to work with people. Don't think that you are more important than others...or that your culture is better than other peoples' culture.” Min believes that many immigrants lose their self-confidence when they immigrate. Based on this, Min advised:

Speak up! I think confidence is really important. When immigrants from other countries come to the U.S, our confidence level decreases because there are a lot of things we don't understand, and we cannot explain very well. With the initial language barrier, we cannot really talk to everybody very freely but, at the same time, immigrants' skills and competencies are still very good and effective—but because of the change from one culture to another culture, it definitely becomes a long process. It's very important to remind yourself that you are still very good, and you have these very great ideas and perspectives. I once received a comment from my previous manager who said, ‘hey, you have to build up your confidence level.’



Even though I feel that I am very confident, there is a difference in how confidence is demonstrated in U.S. culture compared to Chinese culture where you need to appear humble. Some people don't know what they are doing but they still appear very confident in the U.S. culture.

### *Achievement Oriented and Results Focused*

All 10 immigrant workers mentioned two or more traits or skills relative to a theme labeled *Achievement Oriented and Results Focused*. Min was very passionate about her Achiever characteristics. She stated:

Another trait of mine (in StrengthsFinder terms) is Achiever. It is also a very important trait for me because leaders want to see results. They just do not want to hear you talking. So, I always ask what is the next step? The next step is what I take because I would like to take action to get results.

Fatimah appeared to resonate with this by describing how hard work led to her first promotion. Even though she was not the manager, at the time she worked as though she was the manager including learning by herself and assuming responsibilities. She said:

Speaking about my first management role, it was a little bit different. Before I was given the role, I began working by myself independently because my boss at the time was overseeing multiple locations. She was responsible for two different properties, and she was not in the office all the time. I was by myself and leading the office even though I was not the manager.

Nine of the participants mentioned *task focused & results oriented, organizational commitment & loyalty, attention to details & deadlines, initiative & persistence*. Benedict was very persistent in acquiring a leadership role. Despite all of the advanced degrees

obtained, he was not successful in getting a leadership role at the company where he had spent 15 years working, but he persisted until he was promoted.

Bandile was laser-focused on achievement as well. Whatever he did was in service of becoming successful:

I always wanted to be better. From the onset even before coming to the U.S., I always had the mindset that I wanted to come to the U.S. and obtain an American education. I put a lot of planning into it. The job I took coming right out of college was in public accounting. It did not pay much, but you gain a lot of strength as an accountant. You develop your skills. You learn accounting better when you go into public accounting.

Participants also spoke about organizational commitment. Elena's commitment to her organization by meeting deadlines and being 100% committed helped her gain a promotion. She said:

On the personal side, I'm a team player and I think that's something they saw in me. I like to be honest with people and vice versa. I also think I'm a hard-working person. I meet deadlines and that is very important. This is needed in a lot of jobs. When you have a commitment, and you meet it—that is commendable. I'm a person that gives 100% of myself.

Bandile agreed that organization loyalty is important. He said "The other thing is loyalty. I've been working with this company for 17 years. Prior to that, I worked for another company for 5 years. I'm loyal to institutions or individuals who I work with."

Participants also stressed the importance of being attentive to details to gain promotion.

Ezra's strategy involved being highly detail oriented. He emphasized attention to detail as one of the factors for promotion:

Don't be satisfied with stopping at the minimum, pay attention to detail and go beyond what's evidently right there so the job is done in a better way. Listen for the details and help other team members that are with you but not as equally technically capable.

### ***Desire for Learning and Development***

All 10 immigrant workers mentioned the *Desire for Learning and Development*. Of those, eight participants mentioned the importance of *higher education*. Elena stated that education was power:

I am a big believer that education opens doors for you. Education is power. It doesn't matter what type of position you have; whether it's in a corporation or construction; the education that you have opens doors for you. What I would recommend is: education, increase your knowledge, keep learning, and become an expert in whatever subject you like.

Andrew concurred with her that skill training or some level of education is important. He warned immigrants to seek education first after immigrating to the United States:

Many come here, and they are not willing to learn, not willing to learn a trade, or learn anything. They come here and they are focused on making money. That should not be your first priority. Your first priority is for you to gain some kind of skills or some kind of education and then you build from that and then life becomes a lot easier.

Benedict also agreed that getting a better education as an immigrant is the best way to gain promotion. He immigrated to the United States with a high school diploma but elevated himself by obtaining double bachelor's and double master's degrees and is at the precipice of obtaining a doctorate degree. He said "It has been very challenging for me. When I started my career in the medical industry, I only had a high school diploma; so, I started to pursue my bachelor's degree to uplift myself." Ezra also agrees that education put you at a higher level within the labor force. He said:

The legalization of my status delayed my career growth within the United States. I was temporarily allowed to reside in U.S., and I had to pay out of pocket to obtain an education because I didn't qualify for federal loans. That took me a longer time to complete my studies. Had I gone to school directly and gotten the degrees I wanted, I wouldn't have applied for those smaller positions. I would have begun at a level commensurate to my academic qualification.

Stanley was cognizant of education or some form of learning orientation being the engine for promotion. He researched training programs that would enhance his capacity and initiated them whenever they weren't available. He stated:

I usually initiated trainings that I heard of from friends, coworkers, and external partners. I have gone to so many trainings both locally and nationally. Most often, I sought out the trainings. The organization had a policy of encouraging everyone to look for training in their area of expertise.

### ***Interpersonal Skills***

Eight out of the 10 participants mentioned *Interpersonal Skills* as an important trait for promotion within U.S. organizations. Of those, six mentioned *teamwork &*

*collaboration*. Bandile mentioned that people within U.S. organization work in teams most of the time, so it is increasingly important to exhibit a collaborative spirit for promotion. He also emphasized *listening skills*:

For someone to listen to you, you must first listen to them. It all starts from you having the skill of listening to people. When you learn to listen to people, it's very easy for them to listen to you. That's where the relationship develops, that's where the trust begins to build up. That is where the respect comes in. It all starts with you being a very active listener. Listening to people, being able to deliver what is expected and building relationship are skills you must demonstrate for leadership positions. In the United States, there is a lot of collaboration. To work in a group environment, people must listen to one another.

He also agreed with Bandile on acquiring listening skills. He prefers talking less and listening more:

The key things I learned were listen more, talk less, and take initiatives. Don't be shy in the group meetings. I know you have a lot of ideas to contribute just like everyone. That is one of the key things that made me who I am.

Two of the participants mentioned *treating others with respect* as a skill for promotion. Kenji was keen on collaboration and respect for others' culture and academic achievements. He said:

The capacity to just be able to work with others as a team is crucial for anything. Whether I was running a business or when I was in the banking industry, I had to have that capacity to be willing or able to work with others collectively as a team. There are days and times when we are needed to work individually but I think in

this day and age, collaboration and collective effort can go much farther and longer than one person generating and then implementing their own ideas. I will also say, value the background of each individual. By that I mean we are all from different ethnic, racial, and academic backgrounds. So, just being willing to value each individual with their own ideas, their own background as well. We all are different, and we all may approach a subject differently, but coming together as a team and looking at it as a whole, and then accessing the different ideas and approaches and strategies, make it the best it can be. For me, I've always been very open to making sure that I do not cross over to where I am offending another person.

Benedict also had some advice who wanted to become successful in American organizations. He said, "If you want to become successful in a team, you must understand that teamwork is very important, and you must respect other people."

### ***Multiculturalism & Diversity***

All 10 immigrant workers mentioned *Multiculturalism and Diversity*. Seven of the 10 interviewees mentioned the *value of diversity*. Elena was quick to describe the importance of respecting diversity in the workplace. She stated:

I'm also able to interact with different types of cultures with respect. This is very important when you are living in the U.S.A. and interacting with people from all over the world. We are all different; so, we need to listen and understand that there are differences between us, but also respect each other.

Min stressed the need for bringing a global perspective to team conversations, but in a way that is respectful. She said:

I think my American counterparts definitely have a different perspective. Most of my team members are mostly white people who probably do not have international experience so I contributed to the conversation since I could think differently from them. I could say maybe this is something I came across when I was in Shanghai or a different global company. I think that is an advantage because as immigrants we have different international experiences. I think it is important to contribute to that conversation in a very diplomatic way. I am still learning and do not want to come across as aggressive or trying to dominate the conversation. I think it's very important to contribute a very diverse perspective but do it respectfully.

Benedict confirmed that a leadership position requires certain skills and competencies, including diversity and inclusion skills. He stated:

Whenever people go into leadership positions, there are a few things people look at: Do you have the experience? Who has been here before? Who understands what is going on and who can solve problems? Who understands diversity and inclusion, and cultural sensitivity? Those were some of the skills and competencies that helped me excel to where I am today.

Six of the 10 interviewees believed they experienced *racism* during their promotion process and described how they were able to deal with it. Ezra mentioned that he was denied a higher-level position mainly due to his race. According to Ezra, he was the most qualified and had even led a pilot project successfully but was denied the actual position instead:

After more than 20 years in the United States, I have adjusted mentally. I trust what I know, and I know what I can do, but I also know that the odds are always against me. Let me give you one example: I moved from Internal Audit to a part of the company called Capital Markets. When I got there, there were several incomplete projects. The senior manager wanted those projects completed but employees working on those projects were struggling. They did not understand the technology fully to complete the project. When I got there, I was asked to lead the project. The project was successful. Based on its positive result, she took it to the director, who later approved our department to use the technology. There was an interview set up later for someone to officially lead the project. When we got to the interview, one manager showed up 8 minutes late into a 30-minute interview. She showed up and asked me only two questions. In the end the position was given to another woman—after I had already successfully implemented the pilot project.

Ezra also believes that he is stalled in his current position because of racism:

I've experienced racism. I am at my current level because I am an immigrant. If I were a Caucasian American; I would have been two levels higher. They try to frustrate you so that's why I say you must have patience. Another option is to pay attention to the actual technical work and, at the same time, consider other opportunities. As an immigrant if you are easily discouraged, then you will get discouraged sooner rather than later. You've got to have a lot of patience to grow in American organizations.



Andrew also experienced racism with some of the questions he was asked as an immigrant. He said:

Yeah, racism is real. Those things were things that I experienced. Some of the questions I was asked were very ignorant – like: ‘Did you wear clothes in Africa?’ Some would be very sarcastic, and you have to be very patient, or you could become very agitated and say things you might regret.

Bandile experienced racism in the form of preference. People preferred speaking to an American with an American accent rather than an immigrant with a foreign accent. He shared:

I have dealt with racism. It’s a common thing in the environment that we find ourselves, especially those of us who are immigrants. One of the common ways in which it is shown is when you get a call directed to you as the reference person. As soon as you begin to speak, the person on the other line would say ‘oh, I wanted to talk to somebody about this. Are you that person or can you direct me to the person whom I should be talking to?’ You instantly realize that it’s because of your accent and you don’t sound American.

### ***English Proficiency***

Five out of the 10 immigrant workers interviewed recommended *English Proficiency* as an important skill for gaining promotion within American organization. Elena’s advice is for immigrants to continue learning English. She commented, “What I would recommend is: education, increase your knowledge, keep learning, and become an expert in whatever subject you like. Learn English—don’t stop learning English—and be committed.” Min also concurred with Elena. She said:

Another thing would probably be to work harder because English is not my native language. I probably have to read it several times to understand it and make sure that my understanding is correct. It may be that in my culture, this is perceived differently, but in U.S. culture it is perceived another way. So, cultural awareness is very important.

Min further explained during our conversation that it longer time to respond to communications due to the language barrier. She elaborated:

As I mentioned, I definitely had to spend a lot of time understanding some communication. I also had to be very careful in my choice of words because of the differences in meanings. I had to be careful when talking with employees especially, when I was in the HR manager role. The employee population was very diverse so, I had to be very careful with the language I was using with them in case we had different understandings of words or phrases. When they talked about something I didn't understand, I asked them for clarification. So, definitely it takes more time for me to understand what they were saying and also more time for me to structure my response.

### **Hiring Managers**

There were as many as 35 primary themes identified from the interviews with hiring managers which were clustered into 7 higher order themes as shown in Table 9.

**Table 9***Primary and Higher-Order Themes from Interviews with Hiring Managers*

Primary Theme/Code	Interview(s) Where Theme Was Cited	Higher-Order Theme
Eligible to work in U.S. without sponsorship	2, 3	
English proficiency	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Good communicator, express self effectively	1, 2, 3, 4	Basic Work Requirements
Appropriate academic background	4, 5	
Appropriate technical/professional skills	4	
Applicable experience from home country	1	
Transferable skills from home country	4	
Good interpersonal skills	4, 5	
Work collaboratively	1	Interpersonal Skills
Establish partnerships	2, 3	
Interact effectively with others	4	
Take initiative	2	
Be efficient and productive	4	
Drive projects – start and finish them	4	Achievement Orientation
Be a problem solver	4	
Stay focused	4	
Be eager to advance	5	
Be a continuous learner	2	
Obtain a degree, open to (re)education	3	Desire for Learning & Development
Willingly ask for help	1	
Receptive to coaching	2, 5	
Look for allies	1	
Confidence	1, 3	
Resilience	2, 3, 4	Personal Traits & Characteristics
Show curiosity	2, 5	
Adaptability	2, 3, 4	
Passionate	4	

Primary Theme/Code	Interview(s) Where Theme Was Cited	Higher-Order Theme
Know or learn history of U.S.	1	Knowledge of U.S.
Understand or learn about the U.S. business culture	3	
Know or learn about the industry	2, 3	
Know/learn about the organizational culture/mission	1, 3, 4	
Retain a cultural connection to the community	1	Multiculturalism & Diversity
Keep family and community close	1	
Have a world view	4	
See diversity as a strength	2	

***Basic Work Requirements***

All five Hiring Managers interviewed expressed the need for immigrant to meet *Basic Work Requirements*. Two hiring managers mentioned that U.S. compliance regulations for employment require that one must be eligible to work in the United States. Some of those eligibility criteria require *sponsorship*. Olivia, who has been in Human Resources for most of her career, stated:

We ask all candidates if they are eligible to work in the U.S. with or without sponsorship. We are legally required to ask of all candidates. Now, if they are immigrants and require sponsorship, then that would be something we might go deeper into. There are some roles that we are able to provide sponsorship for and others we can't.

Charlotte, who is also a seasoned hiring manager and has been hiring immigrants for the past 24 years, confirmed Olivia's assertion amongst the other barriers immigrants face during the hiring and promotion process. She said:

Sometimes language is a huge barrier—specifically, lack of English skills. There is also an issue of having the authorization to work in the United States, visa status, and mostly confidence. It's confidence and a lack of knowledge of the way business is run in the United States. That's a huge barrier for immigrant workers.

All five hiring managers noted *proficiency in the English language* could be a barrier for immigrants. As previously mentioned in Charlotte's comment; communicating in English can become a huge barrier for immigrants. Olivia agreed:

There are two things that I feel are lacking. I would not necessarily say that they're at a disadvantage but at times, there is a language challenge. There could be a communication or language barrier. When English is not their primary language and the organization is not bilingual or multilingual, it becomes harder for them.

Emma outlined several areas where she felt immigrants needed improvement including being able to *express yourself effectively*. She said:

Talk about your compassion, highlight your interests in whatever job you're applying for, and demonstrate your ability to be productive. Be engaging, creative, and highlight what you can personally bring to the table. Also, emphasize resilience, toughness, and efficiency in answering questions.

One hiring managers spoke about the need to have appropriate *technical professional skills, applicable experience, and transferable skills*. Emma mentioned that these were not criteria she specifically evaluated in immigrant applicants, but rather applicants in general. She said:

I know you probably want me to speak specifically to the immigrant worker. It's very similar to all of the people that I interview. I look for technical skills, soft personal skills, professional etiquette, academic, and personal background. I like for all candidates to specifically share and demonstrate their personalities.

### *Interpersonal Skills*

Five out of five hiring managers mentioned *Interpersonal Skills* as a criteria or immigrant workers success within American organizations. Liam is a Facility Manager and has experience hiring immigrants. A credible candidate for Liam is someone who is capable of interacting effectively with the customer, as well as having a strong work ethic. He explained:

Basically, what I look for is the candidate who is best suited for position. Most of the people I hire will be stacking the shelves, working the cash registers, and interacting with the customers. Whoever is capable of doing these things will be the best choice. The one who is willing to work, put in time, and have a strong work ethic is a possible candidate.

Emma is also interested in personality dynamics and appreciates when applicants can show their personality. During the interview, she stated:

I like for all candidates to specifically share and demonstrate their personalities. It helps to see who they are, and how they would fit within my unit and with the people I supervise. I look for personality dynamics, compared to the families we serve, and what qualities, knowledge, or expertise they may have to share.

One hiring manager mentioned the connection with the community they serve as an advantage for any applicant. That connection enables the applicant to *work*

*collaboratively* with those communities. He said “The answer is cultural connection to the people we work with. Whenever we're working heavily within the Hmong community, and I have an applicant who is Hmong and another applicant who isn't, that would certainly be an advantage on top of all their other qualities. The same goes for Latino Spanish speaking, or Somali, Oromo, European, or African American. Being a part of the culture and history and community that we work with is a huge advantage for that applicant.” Olivia agreed that a tie breaker for any applicant would be their ability to build connections and partnerships. She elaborated that building partnerships was an important trait: “Building partnerships is another trait. You must learn to build connections and partnerships to get things done”.

### ***Achievement Orientation***

Three out of five hiring managers mentioned *Achievement Orientation* as a success factor within American organizations. One of those three participants highlighted the need for immigrants to *take initiative, be efficient and productive, drive projects from start to finish, be a problem solver, stay focused, and be eager to advance*. For example, Olivia wanted all applicants and not just immigrants to *take initiative*. She shared:

For all workers, there are key traits that are important to me. There are personal traits around leadership that are consistent for everybody. Every company I've worked for has been a big national organization with thousands of employees. They're big organizations, where initiative is really important. You can't just wait to be told what to do when you are learning how to navigate a complex large organization. You must be curious and have the initiative to learn.

Emma, on the other hand, did not only focus on building connections but on skill sets and *project completion*. She reflected:

With regards to technical skills, it's really about the systems that we utilize. I look to see if there is any knowledge around that. Not just Microsoft Word or Microsoft Office, but overall. Also important is their ability to drive initiative from start to finish.

Liam's experience with immigrant workers highlighted to him their *eagerness to advance*. He gave an example of his sister-in-law:

My sister-in-law got her degree then went on to get her Master's degree. She is consistently pushing herself to be better. Her husband—my brother—and I; we are just happy to get college degrees. We are happy with the Bachelor's, but she constantly tells him to go for his Master's and 'don't settle at the bachelor level.'

### *Desire for Learning & Development*

Four out of five hiring managers mentioned the *Desire for Learning and Development* as a trait they look for when considering immigrants for hire or promotion. Olivia did not single out immigrants in particular, but considers this quality as a criterion for all applicants. In fact, she admires immigrants' desire to continuously learn:

I look for continuous improvement—being able to connect the dots and learn. I would say, have a growth mindset. My experience with immigrant workers is they tend to do really well in those areas because they know they are coming to a new country, and they have to learn a lot. I don't change my criteria of what I'm looking for. Those are the key things that I'm looking for from all candidates.



Charlotte's experience with immigrant workers has given her the opportunity to review numerous resumes from immigrants and interview them. She is heartbroken whenever she comes across a candidate who is extremely qualified for much higher positions, yet is vying for a lower position while forced to re-educate themselves to fit into the American system. She said:

One intriguing thing I've found is immigrants have fantastic experience, and a huge number of degrees, but are undervalued when they get to the U.S. They are not approved to work in their certified field. They have to go back and get educated all over. I get to see someone's resume who has been a college professor yet is applying for a receptionist job. That's heartbreaking to me.

Bendt observed that immigrants do not always willingly ask for help. This could also be a drawback for immigrants. Whenever they are considered for a position but do not have the proper training, they do not necessarily ask for help. According to Bendt, this appears to be common in the immigrant community:

Immigrants struggle in asking for help. I don't know if that's an immigrant thing but a lot of people, whenever they're promoted and for whatever reason don't like to ask for help. They are disappointed whenever they can't get everything done.

This is certainly widespread amongst immigrants. It might be their culture or their personal experience.

Two out of the five hiring managers believed being *receptive to coaching* is a positive attribute for immigrants who want to be successful in American organizations. Olivia believes that requires several skills and traits, but immigrant workers particularly need coaching and mentorship to help them navigate various cultural nuances. She said:

I think building a connection and networking are important. You also should go through the stages of identifying the roles and experiences you want to have, and then build the connections with people in organizations that you desire to be in. Get your foot in the door and then begin to build connections...get a mentor that can help you navigate – whether it's just understanding nuances of the United States or the organization that you're a part of.

### ***Personal Traits & Characteristics***

All five hiring managers mentioned certain *Personal Traits and Characteristics* for hiring or promotion. Three of five participants mentioned *resilience* and *adaptability*. Olivia found immigrant workers to be resilient and adaptable due to the circumstances they have come from. She finds these traits to work in the favor of immigrants:

Many of the immigrants that I've worked with have come from less than ideal living environments. There were circumstances of poverty and war where they had to fight for their lives, and so they leave the country and those unfortunate situations. What I have found is this type of experience has made them resilient and adaptable. They had to endure difficult circumstances in their lives as a result, they're pretty good at navigating difficult situations in the work environment because they're just naturally more resilient and adaptable.

Emma emphasized *resilience* and toughness. She advised:

Talk about your compassion, highlight their interests in whatever job they're applying for, and demonstrate your ability to be productive. Be engaging, creative, and highlight what you can personally bring to the table. Also, emphasize resilience, toughness, and efficiency in answering questions.

Two of five hiring managers mentioned *confidence* and *curiosity*. Charlotte stressed the point that “Immigrants should have confidence and self-awareness. I mean reading the room and knowing your audience and their expectation.” Olivia made a similar point that whenever immigrants are fortunate to get into an organization, they should lean in with curiosity and get to know the organization. She said:

I think once you’re in the organization, you should begin demonstrating that growth mindset and become curious and bold. Learning about the organization, leaning in, and doing. I encourage everyone to do this, but I think especially for someone who's an immigrant worker, take time to make sure you understand the cultural context, get a mentor that can help you navigate.

***Knowledge of the U.S.***

Four of five hiring managers stressed the need for immigrants to have some *Knowledge of the United States*. Three participants mentioned the importance for immigrants to know or learn about the organization culture and mission. Bendt stressed the importance of cultural connection with the people his organization works with. He said:

The answer is cultural connection to the people we work with. Whenever we're working heavily within the Hmong community, and I have an applicant who is Hmong and another applicant who isn't, that would certainly be an advantage on top of all their other qualities. The same goes for Latino Spanish speaking, or Somali, Oromo, European, or African American. Being a part of the culture and history and community that we work with is a huge advantage for that applicant.

Charlotte shared a similar sentiment but stated that it does not only apply to immigrants. During the hiring process, she generally seeks candidates who are concerned with the organization's mission and work:

This is not just for immigrants generally, what I specifically look for during the hiring process is language skills. Whether Africans, or Mexicans, or Asians. We work with a lot of different cultures and different ethnicities; therefore, I'm always looking for language compatibility.

Several participants were concerned about immigrants learning the history of the U.S., the U.S. business culture, and the industry in which they seek to work. Bendt stressed that immigrants were lacking in knowledge of the history of the United States. Immigrants only know the history of the country they came from and do not have the same depth of knowledge about U.S. history. He stated:

Immigrants lack knowledge of the history of America. They bring with them the history of their home country and do not understand how things work in the U.S. For example, the history of the 35W freeway that wiped out the black neighborhood called Rondo, redlining the racial covenants, and the treatment of blacks and immigrants over the centuries, are all lost to a typical immigrant. They do not know the history. When we work with them one-on-one, it's really important to me that everybody knows this kind of history.

Charlotte also made similar observations concerning immigrants learning American history. She stated "It's a lack of knowledge of the way business is run in the United States. That's a huge barrier for immigrant workers." Charlotte further discussed immigrants learning the American economy and what's expected: "Learning the U.S.

business style is also important. When I say learn more about U.S. style of business, I'm not talking about just being an employee, but what makes the American economy tick.”

Olivia stressed the importance of cultural nuances. She found immigrants lacking a firm grasp of the historical context in the United States. She said:

The other part is cultural context and understanding. If you grew up in one country and you're working in a primarily based U.S. company that's not global, you may not have all the cultural understanding of some of the nuances.

### ***Multiculturalism & Diversity***

Three out of five hiring managers mentioned the theme *Multiculturalism and Diversity*. Emma considered a diverse mind as a strength. She stressed that it would be productive to have an immigrant on her team due to diversity in opinions:

From a personality perspective, I would say it's their worldview, compared to individualistic perspective as an American born. Their ability to potentially move from individualism to a more community focused dimension. I think we benefit from that, including my own unit. I do definitely look for someone who could supplement our own ideas. Definitely those are the things I would love to hear more about in interviews. I love differences.

Olivia had a similar perspective. She reflected:

When one thinks about the dynamics in the world today around diversity and inclusion and the business value it creates when you have diversity on your team, I think that is an advantage if you have different perspectives on your team. You have a global perspective and many organizations like mine, are a global company. We're in 150 countries. We have just as many employees outside of the

U.S. as we do within the U.S., therefore it's important for us to bring the value of having a diverse team to live through that. Immigrants bring new and different perspectives.

Bendt noted immigrants often retain a cultural connection to the community and keep family and community close to maintain that diverse mindset. He stated:

Immigrant cultures have a formality during their initial meetings with you. They respect their elders and even carry themselves differently. There's a particular way of addressing a person, a way of speaking, dressing, a way of letting a person finish their thought, leave a little pause, and then start talking. It's all a kind of a formality, but that is not part of the blue-collar culture here in America. You can easily tell an immigrant from a non-immigrant. I look for people that are aware enough about these things that they can learn and respect that there are these different styles, and you should be multicultural in that sense.

## Chapter 6: Discussions and Recommendations

The central research topic of this study was to uncover and document personal qualities and attributes such as knowledge, traits, abilities, skills, and other personal characteristics that immigrant workers need to be successful in US organizations. This study attempted to identify a set of factors that immigrants could use as a guideline for success. Based on the interview data, seven clusters of traits and skills emerged for both the Immigrant Worker and Hiring Manager participants.

### Similarities Between Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers

Of the seven higher-order themes or clusters generated from each group of participants, five were very similar or overlapping. As shown in Tables 8 and 9, these themes were:

- Personal Traits and Characteristics
- Interpersonal Skills
- Achievement Orientation
- Desire for Learning and Development
- Multiculturalism and Diversity

All 10 Immigrants and all 5 Hiring Managers identified at least one personal trait as important. However, as indicated by the primary themes, Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers mentioned only 2 primary themes that were the same—*confidence* and *adaptability*. Immigrant Workers generated a slightly longer list of personal traits compared to Hiring Managers, which is perhaps simply a function of having interviewed more Immigrant Workers. Nonetheless, a close inspection of Tables 8 and 9 show that Immigrant Workers tended to emphasize “character traits” such as *honesty*, *integrity*,

*patience* and *humility*, whereas Hiring Managers included traits that underly an openness to learning and new experiences such as *curiosity*, *passion*, and *resilience*. Despite this difference in emphasis, both Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers, both Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers agreed that certain personal traits and characteristics are critical to success in U.S. organizations.

There was a high level of agreement from both Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers that *Interpersonal Skills* are important. Eight of 10 Immigrant Workers and all 5 Hiring Managers mentioned that *teamwork*, *collaboration*, *partnership* or *relationships* were needed *Interpersonal Skills*. This is not a surprising result since in most American organizations, teamwork and collaboration are essential for team effectiveness.

Although they are labeled slightly differently, the Immigrants' *Achievement Oriented & Results Focused* is largely the same as the Hiring Managers, "*Achievement Orientation*. In addition to the aspirational component of "drive" or "achieving", both groups also offered comments reflecting the idea of productivity and working hard. Immigrants mentioned *task and results-oriented*, *attention to detail and deadlines*, and *hardworking*, among others. Similarly, Hiring Managers' comments indicated they believe it is important to show that an individual can *be efficient and productive*, *drive projects – start and finish them*, and *be a problem solver*. Of note is the inclusion of the primary theme of *organizational commitment* and *loyalty* mentioned by four Immigrant Workers. This is consistent with the Aspirational component of the CLC model of High Potential discussed in the literature review (Corporate Leadership Council, 2005). One Hiring Manager also noted a CLC aspirational element reflected in the primary theme of demonstrating an *eagerness to advance*. Clearly, both Immigrant Workers and Hiring



Managers appear to understand that having and demonstrating a strong drive to achieve is an important quality for immigrant success and advancement in the workplace.

A fourth theme that both Immigrants and Hiring Managers indicated was important was a *Desire for Learning and Development*. However, each group seemed to emphasize a different aspect of this theme. All 10 Immigrants interviewed recommended that immigrants seeking employment in U.S. organizations should obtain *higher education*. However, it is somewhat unclear as to why. Clearly, most professional jobs require a Bachelor's degree, especially for leadership roles; and if Immigrants are competing with U.S. workers for managerial and executive positions in larger organizations, many of the U.S. workers may have already completed an MBA. On the other hand, only two Hiring Managers mentioned higher education (i.e., *appropriate academic background*) among other *Basic Work Requirements* they listed.

It may be that obtaining a Bachelor's or advanced degree affords immigrants a more accessible way to experience and adjust to the U.S. culture. For Immigrants, getting admitted to a program in higher education (graduate or undergraduate) may be less difficult than finding a suitable professional role. In a college or university setting, immigrants may be able to learn (more) about the U.S. culture, practice or perfect their spoken (and written) English and gain some level of confidence or comfort that they can survive and succeed in a culture different from their native culture. Immigrants may need to make sure they do not labor under the impression that getting a degree automatically qualifies a person for a certain job, considering the job may have other requirements (e.g., appropriate education or training *and* experience).

Nevertheless, Hiring Managers value learning and development – 4 out of the 5 interviewed very clearly indicated this in their stories and responses to the interview questions. However, it appears from their comments that Hiring Managers are more apt to value an “attitude” toward learning that shows a person is open to and interested in continuing to learn – about the job, the organization, and continuing to acquire and strengthen the skills needed for good performance and career advancement (rather than just completing a formal program in higher education). It should be noted that six Immigrant workers also mentioned the importance of having a *learning orientation*. This is consistent with the essence of the Leadership Pipeline (Charan et al., 2011) which describes what an individual needs to learn and develop as a new or next set of skills that may be required at the next level in order to successfully make the transition to that next level if they are promoted.

Finally, the higher-order theme of *Multiculturalism and Diversity* emerged from the interview data for both Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers, but a more thoughtful examination of the primary themes in each shows some important differences. Hiring Managers seem to value diversity, and the strengths it gives Immigrant employees, and seem to advocate for or advise Immigrants to retain and use those strengths, skills, and perspectives that an Immigrant may have by virtue of him or her being culturally or racially diverse, or different from the mainstream in some other way. Their comments tend to be fairly consistent with the model of intercultural success provided by van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2014). Immigrants interviewed also stressed *valuing diversity*, but six participants also explicitly mentioned *dealing with racism* as a primary theme. More importantly, they describe their reactions to experiencing the negative aspects of

racism by highlighting the skills they developed and approach to dealing with racist or inequitable treatment from others in a constructive fashion.

Bandile's method for dealing with racism is to assume the other person was ignorant about the impact of his or her behavior: "My whole mindset surrounding racist behavior is to assume the one being racist is ignorant or oblivious; because if the person knew better, they wouldn't treat people poorly based on their color or ethnicity. You shouldn't be judging people on those bases". Kenji used his experience as a teaching moment: "As for the work environment...this is how I approached it: I did not attack the person, but I did reach out and share with them. I explained the situation and I made sure that they were clear that what they did was wrong." Andrew also commented: "Yeah, racism is real. Those things were things that I experienced. Some of the questions I was asked were very ignorant – like: 'Did you wear clothes in Africa?' Some would be very sarcastic, and you have to be very patient, or you could become very agitated and say things you might regret". These comments are also consistent with the constructive coping strategies recommended by van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2014).

### **Key Differences Between Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers**

Two additional themes emerged for both Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers. Immigrant Workers identified *English Proficiency* and *Mentoring and Coaching* as distinct themes. Immigrants explicitly discussed problems with understanding English spoken by Americans and the need to speak English in a way that is understood by others. At least 5 Immigrants interviewed discussed the necessity and benefits of being able to do this well. Other research has documented this as an issue, particularly as it relates to the issue of speaking English with an accent that may be

difficult for U.S. natives to easily understand (Batalova et al., 2021; Bennett, 2020; Bradley-Geist & Schmidtke, 2018; Stokes, 2017). Hiring Managers, on the other hand, did not single out “speaking” or “communication” skills. Rather they tended to include it as only one element in the theme of “*Basic Work Requirements*”.

Immigrant interviewees also place a fairly clear and exclusive emphasis on obtaining the benefits of *Mentoring and Coaching*. While this was mentioned by a majority of Immigrants, it is neither a trait nor a skill. Immigrant workers, when asked for advice they might give to other Immigrants seeking career success in the U.S., recommended mentorship with individuals who have helpful knowledge and experience. Underlying the opportunity to benefit from mentoring and coaching may be skills involved in seeking out and maintaining a useful mentoring or coaching relationship; and traits such as openness and interest in learning and improvement. Notably, three Hiring Managers mentioned primary themes such as a *willingness to ask for help* and a *receptivity to coaching* that became part of the Hiring Managers’ higher-order theme of *Desire for Learning and Development*. These themes for Immigrant Workers are identified as a key difference from those of Hiring Managers primarily because of the singular importance half or more of Immigrant participants placed on them.

Stories and interview responses from Hiring Managers also revealed two themes in their comments that were not prominent in the comments from Immigrant Workers: *Basic Work Requirements* and *Knowledge of the U.S.* Along with English proficiency, good communication skills, and appropriate education and training, Hiring Managers mentioned themes such as *legal work eligibility*, *technical skills*, *transferable skills*, and *applicable experience* which, taken together, comprised the Hiring Managers’ higher-

order theme of *Basic Work Requirements*. It may be that this theme emerged from the more extensive experience with the hiring process that Hiring Managers had – most had 10 or more years of hiring experience whereas most immigrants had been through the hiring/promotional process less than five times (see Tables 6 and 7. It may also be the case that Hiring Managers were simply trying to be cooperative interview subjects. When asked what they looked for in hiring an immigrant worker, they may have felt it necessary to mention these things.

For Immigrants, these requirements or expectations may be so fundamental that they were taken for granted. Few people would expect to be hired (in their home or a different country) if they were not eligible to work, did not have the appropriate academic training or job experience, or could not communicate well. It is unlikely that Immigrants interviewed were unaware of these basic requirements. It is more likely that they felt (correctly) that the interview was more focused on identifying the skills and traits that lead to success, and not about whether they were aware of the most basic or fundamental criteria for employment. In any case, *Basic Work Requirements* emerged as a more complete and distinct theme for Hiring Managers than for Immigrants, even though both groups mentioned the need for speaking English well.

A fairly unique higher-order theme emerged from comments made by four of five Hiring Managers: *Knowledge of the U.S.* Comments contributing to this theme were largely absent in the stories and recommendations from the Immigrant Workers. Four Hiring Managers made various comments related to the need for immigrant workers to learn about the U.S., including its' history, the way business is conducted, and their organization and its industry. Of note is the clear focus they placed on learning about the

way business is conducted in the United States (e.g., the *Free Enterprise* system), which may differ considerably from the way it is conducted in their home country. Hiring Managers stated they felt this knowledge would be highly advantageous to immigrant workers seeking career advancement.

### **Are Models of High Potential, Leadership Skills/Competencies, and Intercultural Success Useful to Immigrants?**

In all, 10 models of high potential, leadership skills and competencies, and multicultural effectiveness were reviewed in Chapter 2. It is useful to consider whether some or all of these are relevant for immigrant workers seeking to advance their careers. Since most of these models were developed primarily for a U.S. (or at least western) audience, are they applicable for immigrants? In immigrant's interviews, do they provide comments that are reflected in the components and elements of the models reviewed? Do hiring managers who are experienced with hiring and promoting immigrant workers value the elements reflected in the models? The answer to these questions appears to be "*yes...to a large (but not complete) extent*".

Evidence for this conclusion is presented in Table 10, which indicates where immigrants' interview comments are consistent with the main components of three select models:

- The Silzer and Church (2009) Model of High Potential
- The Great Eight Competencies (Bartram et al., 2002)
- The Model of Multicultural Effectiveness (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2014)

These models were selected for review because they are the most complete, detailed, and best supported by prior research. Moreover, an analysis of all 10 models reviewed previously would be cumbersome and beyond the scope of this discussion.

Table 10 was constructed by reproducing the major components of each of these models (see Table 1 and Figure 1, Table 2, and Table 5). Interview content, reflected in the 25 primary themes from interviews with successful Immigrant Workers (see Table 8) and the 35 primary themes that emerged from interviews with Hiring Managers (see Table 9), was then inspected to identify whether and where any of these primary themes were reflected anywhere in the content or definitions of the models' components. This included making judgments about whether a primary theme label was similar to or had essentially the same meaning as an element of a particular model.

As shown in Table 10, Immigrant Worker and Hiring Manager interview comments are reflected in a majority of each model's major components. Interview comments (e.g., primary themes) were represented best in the Great Eight Competencies (Bartram, et al., 2002), although there is also substantial overlap between the primary themes from interviews and the models of High Potential (Silzer & Church, 2009) and Multicultural Effectiveness (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2014). Primary themes from interviews with Hiring Managers appear to be slightly better represented in the models compared to those from Immigrant Workers.

With respect to the Silzer/Church model of High Potential, Immigrant Worker primary themes are represented in four of the model's components. For example, the component of "Personality Characteristics" includes Immigrant Worker primary themes such as *open-mindedness, patience, confidence, teamwork and collaboration*, and other

**Table 10***Evidence of Interviewees' Comments in Select Models of High Potential, Skills/Competencies, and Intercultural Success*

High Potential (Silzer & Church, 2009)			Skills/Competencies (Bartram et al., 2002)			Intercultural Effectiveness (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2014)		
Model's Major Components	Immigrants	Hiring Mgrs.	Model's Major Components	Immigrants	Hiring Mgrs.	Model's Major Components	Immigrants	Hiring Mgrs.
Personality Characteristics	✓	✓	Leading & Deciding		✓	General Personality Traits	✓	✓
Cognitive Capabilities			Supporting & Cooperating	✓	✓	Intercultural Personality Traits	✓	✓
Learning Skills	✓	✓	Interacting & Presenting	✓	✓	Core Self-Evaluations	✓	✓
Motivation Skills	✓	✓	Analyzing & Interpreting			Stable Motivational Factors	✓	✓
Leadership Skills			Creating & Conceptualizing	✓	✓	Coping Strategies		✓
Functional/Technical Skills	✓	✓	Organizing and Executing	✓	✓	Attachment Styles		
			Adapting & Coping	✓	✓			
			Enterprising & Performing	✓	✓			



*interpersonal skills*. Similarly, primary themes from interviews with Hiring Managers such as *good interpersonal skills, work collaboratively, resilience, and adaptability* appear in the “Personal Characteristics” component of the High Potential model. The model’s component of “Learning Skills” is defined as an interest in ongoing learning, an openness to feedback, and the trait of adaptability. The primary themes from Immigrant Workers’ interviews that match this definition include comments from six participants who discussed the benefits of cultivating a strong *learning orientation*. Hiring managers similarly mentioned themes such as *be a continuous learner, willingly ask for help, and be receptive to coaching*. Silzer and Church’s (2009) “Motivation Skills” component’s themes include drive, energy, initiative, achievement orientation, producing results, and career ambition. In their interviews, Immigrant Workers mentioned *being task and results focused, hardworking, and achievement-oriented*. Hiring Managers echoed these themes by noting the importance of *taking initiative, driving projects to completion, and showing an eagerness to advance*. Finally, the High Potential model component of Functional/Technical skills is supported by immigrants who recommended getting appropriate *skills training*, and by Hiring Managers who generated themes such as the importance of having *appropriate technical/professional skills* and *understanding the U.S. business culture* and *learning the about the industry* in which their organization competes.

The two other models selected for inclusion in Table 10 are not discussed in the degree of detail presented above. However, the interested reader and/or researcher can conduct their own, similar evaluation by comparing the primary themes in Tables 8 and 9 to Table 2 to match content between interviewees’ primary themes and the various

definitions comprising the Great Eight Competencies. To analyze the match between interviewee primary themes and the model of multicultural effectiveness (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2014), Tables 8 and 9 can be compared to Table 5.

Before leaving this discussion, it is worthwhile to offer two final observations. First, there are important components in the various models for which no or very little evidence could be found in the participant interview data. For example, Immigrant Workers offer no comments in their interviews that could be clustered into a higher-order theme reflecting leadership skills. Immigrants offered no comments in their interviews regarding the importance of having or learning to manage, motivate, or develop others. One Hiring Manager mentioned *take initiative*, and another noted the need to *drive projects from start to finish*. These are similar to elements included in the Great Eight Competencies definition of “Leading and Deciding”, but this is fairly minimal agreement or support for the importance of leadership. Comments describing “Cognitive Capabilities” in the High Potential Model, and “Analyzing & Interpreting: from the Great Eight Competencies model are also absent in both the Immigrant Worker and Hiring Manager interviews.

A second final observation concerns the traits and skills important to Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers that are not mentioned or included in the models of High Potential or Leadership Skills/Competencies. In their interviews, Immigrants and Hiring Managers noted the impact of language (particularly speaking English with an accent), and of the overall need to develop skills to deal constructively with both the potential positive and negative consequences of many immigrants being an obviously diverse segment of the workforce.

Though thoughtful and comprehensive, the models by Silzer and Church (2009), the Great Eight Competencies (Bartram et al., 2002) and other High Potential and Skills/Competency Models do not include *Multiculturalism and Diversity* as a specific skill set. The Silzer/Church High Potential Model does include certain traits and skills such as *learning*, *achievement-orientation*, and *adaptability* that are also listed in the model of van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2014) as being important for intercultural effectiveness but neither model explicitly or directly addresses *multiculturalism and diversity*.

Similarly, the Great Eight Competencies Model includes “Adapting and Coping” as one competency factor where individuals learn to adapt and respond well to change or are able to manage pressure effectively and cope well with setbacks. Again, this does not explain *multiculturalism and diversity* where both Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers discussed *valuing diversity*, *dealing with racism*, *having a world view*, *seeing diversity as a strength*, or *staying close to your community* as important traits and skills that are helpful to Immigrant Workers eager for promotion in American organizations. Nonetheless and despite these omissions, there is more evidence from the Immigrant Worker and Hiring Manager interviews that support the relevance of the various models reviewed to immigrants who are seeking promotion and career success than place them in question or suggest they are irrelevant for the growing population of immigrant workers.

### **Recommendations for Participants: Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers**

This study collected interview data from 10 successful immigrant workers and five hiring managers in an effort to catalogue the traits and skills that are associated with career success in U.S. organizations. The results were largely consistent with previous

research and literature that has documented the traits, skills, and competencies that lead to career success and advancement. Because of their “immigrant” status, models of intercultural effectiveness were also considered, and this study’s findings are also generally consistent with these models. Among the few surprise findings from this study are the emphasis placed on higher education by immigrants, the benefits Hiring Managers see in demonstrating an understanding of the way business is conducted in the U.S., and the absence of attention to the importance of leadership and cognitive skills in the participant interview data. Drawing on these findings, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Certain personal, interpersonal, motivational, and learning traits and skills are important for career success and advancement. Immigrant workers will benefit from understanding and cultivating these and learning how to demonstrate them in their work behavior.
2. To be successful, immigrant workers need to focus on speaking in English as clearly and understandably as possible. Should they receive feedback (directly or indirectly) that their communication skills are problematic, they may benefit from increased ESL training, or increased practice with a coach or mentor.
3. Immigrant workers need to develop and skillfully use a set of skills to help them deal with the almost certain experience of feeling treated unfairly in the workplace. Traits such as self-confidence, drive, adaptability, and openness provide a good foundation for building or refining these skills.

4. Immigrants interest in promotion or career advancement need to display a greater attention to learning, developing, and demonstrating leadership skills and cognitive capabilities, including skills in managing and motivating others, and critical and strategic thinking.
5. Immigrant workers will benefit from acquiring knowledge of the U.S and its history, and an understanding of the way in which organizations operate and compete in this country, particularly if their home country is not based in capitalism.
6. Some immigrant participants in this study commented on the value they found in being humble, patient, calm, and respectful. These are admirable qualities; however, immigrants should not let traits like these mask their drive, achievement orientation, initiative, or ability to get results which is an important dimension that Hiring Managers value.
7. Similarly, the ability to demonstrate an active learning orientation will be beneficial to immigrants. Evidence of having completed a higher education program or earning an advanced degree may be insufficient to guarantee that an immigrant will be hired or promoted. An active learning orientation includes an openness to feedback, seeking out others' expertise, an explicit desire for personal growth, and an ongoing interest learning new or mastering one's skills.
8. Locating and benefiting from a mentor may be especially useful to immigrant workers. A majority of immigrants interviewed for this study recommended this practice as a helpful way to accelerate their career advancement.

9. Hiring Managers need to make sure immigrants have an accurate understanding of the role and value of completing a formal higher education program. Some immigrant workers may over-value higher education or believe a higher education degree would automatically lead to being hired or promoted.
10. Hiring managers can be helpful to immigrants interested in career advancement by providing honest feedback about their portfolio of experience (if it is lacking) and their ability to communicate (i.e., proficiency with spoken English).
11. Hiring Managers should make sure that immigrant workers have a good capacity to deal with racist behavior from potential co-workers or others.
12. Hiring Managers may benefit (i.e., be able to make better hiring or promotion decisions) if they acquaint themselves with and learn how to evaluate the degree of an immigrant's cultural adjustment to the U.S.

### **Limitations**

A Qualitative Phenomenological methodology using an interview approach for data collection was employed in this study with 10 successful Immigrant Workers and five Hiring Managers experienced with hiring and promoting immigrants. Interviewing Hiring Managers was a strength of the study – presumably, information from hiring managers would be as or more useful to immigrants seeking career advancement, and inclusion of the Hiring Manager participants created an opportunity to compare interview results from the two groups. Nonetheless, the sample size was relatively small, was not representative of all immigrant populations, and limited to participants located in

Minnesota. This created a significant limitation on the generalizability of the study's findings and conclusions.

A second limitation concerns using the English language. Issues related to spoken English surfaced in the literature review and in both the Immigrant Worker and Hiring Manager participant samples, primarily related to immigrants' inability to speak without a difficult to understand accent. However, for a person whose native language is not English, speaking and understanding may not be the only challenges. A person who is learning English may have a smaller vocabulary than a native English speaker. Thus, we cannot be sure that those participants for whom English is a second language were able to respond to the interview questions in as much or as rich detail and precision as native English speakers. To the extent to which this occurred, the analysis, and consequently the findings may have been compromised. That is, some interviewees may not have been able to find or use the right words to fully describe their experiences.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This research provided some insight into and understanding of both Immigrant Workers' and Hiring Managers' experiences and perceptions during the hiring and promotion processes. However, unanswered questions about the immigrant worker experience remain, and the following recommendations are offered to researchers and scholars interested in continuing studies of this topic.

1. One obvious recommendation would be to expand the size and type of study participant. Specifically, immigrants from countries and cultures different from those of the participants in this study could be investigated. Admittedly,

a large, broad scale qualitative study of this type would be logistically difficult.

2. Greater attention could be given to the issue of immigrant's perspectives on the role and values of higher education. Do immigrants widely believe that higher education provides more of a "guarantee" for a position or a promotion in the U.S. than Hiring Managers do?
3. Future research into the experiences of immigrant workers might explicitly include attention to understanding the leadership and cognitive skills immigrant workers say have been important to the career successes they have achieved. This study found a conspicuous absence of attention to these attributes or skill sets which are prominently featured in the models of high potential and skills and competencies reviewed in Chapter 2
4. Studies that focus more exclusively on the experiences of Hiring Managers should be considered. Their views would presumably represent a more objective view of what is required of Immigrant Workers to achieve career success, and an authoritative study documenting Hiring Managers view may be of more interest and use to immigrant workers.
5. Quantitative designs should be employed. This would permit researchers to (hypothetically) increase sample sizes and representativeness of the entire immigrant population in the U.S. workforce. Quantitative designs also have the potential for delivering greater reliability and validity in research results. Given a sufficient sample size, future studies could employ more sophisticated statistical analyses (such as factor analysis or regression analysis) to identify a



stable set of success factors for immigrant workers, and/or determine the importance of various clusters of traits and skills relative to each other. That is, among the various clusters of success factors recommended for immigrants, are some more important than others?

6. Finally, scholars could look for ways to integrate the coping and adjustment strategies used by immigrants, including the skills needed to deal with being diverse or experiencing discrimination in the workplace, into their models of potential, performance, and career success. This may become increasingly important as the U.S. workforce becomes more diverse and the immigrant population in the U.S. continues to grow.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The findings from this study provide support for models of career advancement and success that have populated the research and scholarly literature, and show that these models are relevant to the immigrant worker experience. Most elements in models of the high potential employee, success factors (i.e., skills and competencies), and the traits and skills required for intercultural effectiveness emerged from the responses to the interview questions asked of the participants in this study. A variety of personality traits (e.g., confidence, resilience, adaptability, etc.), interpersonal and learning skills, and motivational factors were described by Immigrant Workers and Hiring Managers in their interviews.

However, this study also added some insight and understanding of the immigrant worker experience that is not clearly reflected in these models. Immigrant Workers recognize that speaking English with an accent can be a disadvantage to them, and

immigrants of different (non-caucasian) ethnic backgrounds appear to be frequently exposed to instances of discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace, requiring them to develop a skill set to constructively address this issue not typically required of their caucasian co-workers. In addition, immigrants may place a greater value on higher education than hiring managers, and may not see the importance of or emphasize leadership and cognitive skills as clearly as the models in the literature recommend.

As the author and principal investigator of this study, the experiences shared by the Immigrant Worker participants profoundly resonate with me, since I am also an immigrant seeking career success within American organizations. Due to the challenges, rejections, and exclusions from the promotion process I have experienced, I was motivated to investigate the specific traits and skills successful Immigrant Workers had exhibited to gain promotion. The experience of conducting this research has certainly satisfied my curiosity but has also raised new and different questions for me. It is my hope that immigrants will find this study provides some insights for them, is useful to them, and will help support and strengthen their efforts to find satisfaction and success in American organizations.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Immigrant Workers

1. Please state your name and give a brief background of yourself, employment status and education level both in your home country and the United States.
2. When did you immigrate and what was your reason for migrating to the United States?
3. What has your promotion process been like and how many times have you been promoted?
4. What are some of the important *skills* you have that helped you get promoted (e.g., listening, etc.)?
5. What are some of the important *traits or personal characteristics* (e.g., self-confidence, honesty, integrity etc.) you have that helped you get promoted?
6. As an immigrant what did you do differently to gain promotion? Did you get special training?
  - Who initiated the training for you?
  - Were there any other factors that helped you gain a promotion (e.g., mentors, etc.)?
7. What did you have to do differently (or more of) compared to U.S.-born workers to gain promotion?
8. Did you experience challenges like racism, sexism, or difficulty in communicating? How did you deal with them?
9. Tell me about your process of adjusting to the U.S.
  - What was easy?
  - What was most difficult?
  - How comfortable or fully adjusted do you feel now?
  - What was most helpful to you in adapting to the U.S.?
10. Knowing what you know now, would you have done it any other way?
11. Do you have any other final comments or advice for incoming immigrants who want success and promotion at work in the U.S.?

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Hiring Managers**

1. Please state your name and give a brief background of yourself, employment status and education level both in your home country and the United States.
2. What specific traits or skills do you look for in a potential immigrant worker?
3. In your experience, what did immigrant workers lack in comparison to a U.S.-born citizens?
4. Whenever the promotion process came to down to an immigrant worker and an American; what was the tie breaker in promoting the immigrant employee?
5. Do you make a conscious effort to assess or gauge the degree of adjustment to the U.S. the immigrant employee had made? If so, how do you do this? What do you look for?
6. In your experience, what edge do immigrant workers hold over a U.S.-born citizen?
7. Do you have any other comments or thoughts that would help me understand what you look at or look for when you are considering promoting an immigrant employee?

## Appendix C: Recruiting Email for Immigrant Workers

Dear [Participant],

My name is Lolita Tuopay and I am a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas. I am conducting a research in fulfillment of the completion of the degree of Doctor of Education. The intent of this email is to invite your participation in my doctoral dissertation research entitled "The Traits and Skills of Successful Immigrant Workers in American Organizations".

The study will ask you to respond to about 10-12 interview questions via zoom audio recording. The interview is expected to last for 60-90 minutes. Questions will pertain to specific traits or skills that have helped you become successful (promotable) within an American organization. Your participation is voluntary and I will do everything I can to maintain confidentiality.

Benefits to Participants:

There will be no direct benefit to you however, your responses will be beneficial to immigrant workers in America who may discover a copy of this study. By identifying specific traits or skills that you utilized to gain promotion, other immigrant workers will be able to learn from your experience and understand the requirement for upward mobility within American organizations. It will also help American organizations identify high potential immigrants. Lastly, it will help fill the gap that is lacking within the immigrant literature that exist currently.

Follow up:

Should you need any clarification pertaining to the research, please contact me directly (Ph. XXX.XXX.XXXX or TUOP5384@stthomas.edu).

Next Steps

Please reply to this email and confirm your interest and willingness to participate. A consent form will be sent to you to initiate the process thereafter. Your prompt response is highly anticipated.

Thank you very much.

Lolita Tuopay

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE / ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

## Appendix D: Recruiting Emails for Hiring Managers

Dear [Participant],

My name is Lolita Tuopay and I am a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas. I am conducting a research in fulfillment of the completion of the degree of Doctor of Education. The intent of this email is to invite your participation in my doctoral dissertation research entitled "The Traits and Skills of Successful Immigrant Workers in American Organizations".

The study will ask you to respond to approximately 10 interview questions via zoom audio recording. The interview is expected to last for 60-90 minutes. Questions will pertain to specific traits or skills that have helped you select immigrant applicants for promotion within your organization. Were there specific traits or skills that rendered them promotable? Your participation is voluntary and I will do everything I can to maintain confidentiality.

### Benefits to Participants:

There will be no direct benefit to you however, your responses will be beneficial to hiring managers of American organizations with immigrant workers who may discover a copy of this study. By identifying specific traits or skills that you recognized in immigrant workers to grant them promotion will help American organizations identify high potential immigrants.

Lastly, it will help fill the gap that is lacking within the immigrant literature that exist currently.

### Follow up:

Should you need any clarification pertaining to the research, please contact me directly (Ph. XXX.XXX.XXXX or TUOP5384@stthomas.edu).

### Next Steps

Please reply to this email and confirm your interest and willingness to participate. A consent form will be sent to you to initiate the process. Your prompt response is highly anticipated.

Thank you very much.

Lolita Tuopay

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE / ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

## Appendix E: General Consent Form

### Research Participation Key Information Title

#### **What you will be asked to do:**

We ask participants to participate in a person-to-person Qualitative interview. Questions will be asked by the researcher. The participants will also be asked to provide a copy of their resumes and review their interview transcripts. Those without resumes will be asked to complete a background questionnaire.

The time commitment is about 60-90 minutes, and the interview will take place via Zoom.

#### **Participating in this study has risks:**

This study poses minimal risk to the participants. The interview questions will ask about your personal experience as an immigrant in the workplace in the United States and will ask about sexism, racism, or other sensitive events which may have occurred. Also, if someone knows your story very well, they may be able to identify you even though I will not use your name or locations in my findings.

### **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

You are invited to participate in a research study about Immigrant Workers. The title of this study is *The Traits and Skills of Successful Immigrant Workers in American Organizations*.

**You were selected as a possible participant and are eligible to participate in the study because you fit the profile of a successful immigrant worker who has been promoted to a managerial level and has been in that position for at least six months; or you must have hired an immigrant worker. You are eligible to participate if you have the appropriate visas, green card, or citizenship to work in the United States.**

The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether you would like to participate or not.

#### **What will you be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- You will be asked to answer qualitative interview questions by the researcher. These questions will ask you about your experiences as an immigrant working in the United States. Some questions may be sensitive, such as whether you have experienced sexism or racism in the workplace.
- The interview will last for approximately 60-90 minutes, the study will take place by way of Zoom. With your permission, I will ask to audio record the interview.

- An estimated number of 10-12 participants will be involved in the first round of interviews of Immigrant Employees, and an additional 5-7 participants will be involved in the second round of interviews for hiring Managers. This interview will take place by way of Zoom which means it will be audio recorded due to the global Corona virus pandemic.
- A follow-up will be made to the participants if there is a need for further clarity. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript for accuracy.

### **What are the risks of being in the study?**

The study has minimal risks to the participants. The interview questions will ask for personal information and your experiences in the workplace, some of which may be uncomfortable to discuss. You are free to skip any questions I ask or stop the interview if you are uncomfortable.

Also, if your story is known by others you may be identified in the findings by people who know you very well. I will not use your name, specific locations, or organization names in my published findings, making it difficult for others to identify you.

### **Here is more information about why we are doing this study:**

This study is being conducted by Lolita Tuopay who is the primary investigator. Dr. Robert Barnett is the faculty advisor along with Dr. Jean Davidson and Dr. Dave Jamieson as committee members respectively.

This research is being reviewed for risk by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board.

This research is important to understand the experiences of successful immigrant workers in American organization and what steps they had to take to gain promotion in the workplace.

I will use the information I collect for research purposes. This will provide clarity on the experiences immigrant workers face in American organizations to gain promotion.

### **Direct Benefits**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, your participation may influence policies or information about traits or skills needed to be successful in American organizations. It may also help American organizations recognize high potential immigrant workers.

### **While we can never guarantee complete confidentiality in research, we believe your privacy and confidentiality are important. Here is how we will do my/our best to protect your personal information:**

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. **You will have control over the date and time of the study, the location, and what you choose to share.** The researcher's OneDrive that is protected by the University of St. Thomas will be used as the reservoir for all data

collected during this study. Paper files used during the process will be stored in the researcher's home office which is accessible to the researcher alone. All information including paper files, and audio recordings will be transferred to the researcher's University of St. Thomas OneDrive and then deleted or destroyed from the researcher's home office immediately. Your name will never be included in any document. I will use identifiers like participant 1 or participant 2 to identify the participants.

The records of this study will be kept as confidential as possible. We will save your information in the most secure online location available to us at the University. We cannot guarantee confidentiality because data security incidents and breaches may occur. In any reports I publish, I will not include information that will make it easy to identify you. The types of records I will create include:

- Interview question- this is important to get information concerning your experience
- Transcripts- this is important so that we are both on the same page with what I heard and what exactly you stated
- Audio recording- this will give me a replay of our interview
- Master list of information- this will help me to narrow down specific pieces of information that are significant for my study.

I will not be traveling during this period of data collection so there will be no need for a break in the process. All data collected will be transferred to the University of St. Thomas OneDrive. All other information in my possession will be immediately deleted, erased, or destroyed after the transfer has been made.

In keeping with the University's compliance procedures, all signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years after the study is completed. The Institutional Review Board of the University of St. Thomas is responsible for the inspection of research records for compliance purposes.

We will keep information about you for future research about immigrants in the United States. We will only use aggregate information and will not use any identifiers in future research. There is no limit to the length of time we will store de-identified information, but if you choose to withdraw from the study your information will not be stored for future use. Your data will be saved in the University of St. Thomas library along with my dissertation and will be accessible.

**This study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the research with no penalties of any kind.**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published and I can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by calling me directly or sending an email to me. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

