Understanding the Employer Experience of Immigration

A report on the findings a qualitative enquiry into the current employer experience of immigration, for those responsible for existing employer support services and to those seeking to make immigration accessible to more employers across New Brunswick.

The personas, insights, and opportunities presented in this document can be used to inform strategic decisions about which employers to focus efforts on and highlights the opportunities most relevant to them.

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Economic Immigration Lab

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À L'UNIVERSITÉ DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

Executive Summary

This document presents the findings of a qualitative enquiry into the current employer experience of immigration. The contents will be of interest to those responsible for existing employer support services, and to those seeking to make immigration accessible to more employers across New Brunswick.

Interviews with nine New Brunswick employers highlight three key attributes that appear to characterise employers and impact their experience of immigration:

- Their **level of engagement** with immigration: employers were either on a continuum of engagement (from first-time to super user) or were disengaged (having stalled or paused immigration efforts). Those who disengaged cited the intrusiveness of the designation process and/or the incompatibility of immigration timelines with their hiring needs.
- The nature of their company's **hiring needs**: immigration appears to be a more viable hiring strategy for companies with predictable hiring needs, than employers who cannot predict the exact skillset or timing and duration of the vacancies (e.g., contract trades, specialist consulting).
- Their **peer support network**: employers who were most actively engaged with immigration also had the strongest peer support networks, both internally (from colleagues who assisted with forecasting, recruitment, and settlement) and externally (with established relationships with settlement agencies, government departments *and* others with experience of immigration).

An additional element of the employers' experience of immigration was their **initial exposure** to immigration. The majority of employers were initially exposed via *unintentional immigrant hires*, when internationally educated students or newcomers applied for general job postings. The success of these unintentional hires motivated the employers to intentionally adopt immigration as a hiring strategy.

Three employer archetypes were observed:

1. **Stalled immigration champions:** those who believe in the benefit of immigration as a recruitment strategy but who "can't make it work" for his company.
2. **Hopeful first timers:** those who are early in the process of hiring/settling intentional immigrant hires and are simultaneously optimistic and anxious about international hiring as a recruitment strategy.
3. **Strategic super users:** those who consider immigration to be a core recruitment strategy. Feels well supported by internal team, and strong relationship with govt and settlement agencies.

Key insights gathered point to immigration challenges *and* enablers serve as opportunities for additional innovation in the space of employer support.

Challenges	Leverage points
Unpredictable hiring needs and cycles	Lessons learned
Administrative over head of immigration	Social capital
Amplified hiring risks	Immigration champions
Burden of settlement	Unintentional immigrant hires
AIPP cold calls	

The observed archetypes, challenges, and leverage points can be used to make strategic decisions about which employers to target and highlight opportunities most relevant to them.

Introduction

The Employer Immigration Account Manager Service (EIAMS) was a service prototype that was created during the Economic Immigration Lab. It was created in response to the following design challenge:

1. *"How might we help small NB recruiters to navigate the immigration process effectively?"*

The intention was that EIAMS would act as a new, direct and dedicated point of contact within Population Growth.

In an effort to better understand the current employer experience of using immigration as a strategy to address difficult-to-fill job vacancies, we carried out interviews with a subset of the employers who had been invited to use the EIAMS service.

This report highlights the key insights raised by the interviews and points to several opportunities for further innovation in the space of improving the employer experience of immigration and increasing the use of immigration by small to medium employers in New Brunswick.

Methods

In order to better understand the employer experience of using immigration as a strategy to address difficult-to-fill job vacancies, we carried out in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with a subset of employers who had been invited to use the EIAMS prototype service. We interviewed nine employers in total, of varying size and degree of engagement with the service.

The interview data was subjected to inductive analysis via the affinity diagramming method. Through the analysis, several themes emerged. The emergent themes were then used to characterise attributes of employers and their experiences of immigration. These attributes were then used to construct three employer personas, evidence-based employer archetypes that can be used as a lens to consider which employers are supported by current services and where there are opportunities to better support others. More generally, the personas can be used to prioritise and inform the design of future services and guide additional user-centred design activities.

Findings

Those employers who had engaged with the EIAMS service expressed high satisfaction with the service that had been provided, best exemplified by the following testimonial:

*What the pilot or Matthew provides to us is he's our go to person for anything to do with the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Project. Any questions I have he's the person I go to. He's my person at the government that if I have any questions, if I have any concerns ... He may not always not have the answers right away but he always gets them for me. He's our frontline and **he's dedicated to us**. [...]*

*Because of the **extraordinary support** of New Brunswick's government and being able to call Matthew and work closely with Matthew, it has made it a much simple and smoother…hiring process, we're wanting people to settle in NB.*

More generally, three key attributes appear to characterise employers and impact their experience of immigration:

- Their **level of engagement** with immigration: employers were either on a continuum of engagement (from first-time to super user) or were disengaged (having stalled or paused immigration efforts). Those who disengaged cited the intrusiveness of the designation process and/or the incompatibility of immigration timelines with their hiring needs.
- The nature of their company's **hiring needs**: immigration appears to be a more viable hiring strategy for companies with predictable hiring needs, than employers who cannot predict the exact skillset or timing and duration of the vacancies (e.g., contract trades, specialist consulting).
- Their **peer support network**: employers who were most actively engaged with immigration also had the strongest peer support networks, both internally (from colleagues who assisted with forecasting, recruitment, and settlement) and externally (with established relationships with settlement agencies, government departments *and* other employers who also had experience with immigration).

An additional element of the employers' experience of immigration was their **initial exposure** to immigration. The majority of employers were initially exposed via *unintentional immigrant hires*, when internationally educated students or newcomers applied for general job postings. The success of these unintentional hires motivated the employers to intentionally adopt immigration as a hiring strategy.

The following sections introduce the personas that illustrate three emergent employer archetypes, the challenges they face, and the things that enable them to leverage immigration.
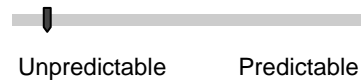
Pete Spencer – Stalled Immigration Champion

Believes in the benefit of immigration as a recruitment strategy but who "can't make it work" for his company.

Company PS Construction

Position Operations Manager

Hiring Needs

Unpredictable   Predictable

Support Network

None

Initial Exposure

Unintentional immigrant hire

Challenges

Intrusive application process

Infeasible cost (time & money)

Unpredictable hiring needs

Enablers

None

On immigration process…

I can't see a downside to immigration at all. As an employer, I wish…. I guess... there has to be an easy way for small to med business to take advantage of it. I wish I had the answers on how to do that but… with the pilot program, what I did read up on, and the forms I had to fill out, it was a fairly elaborate process just to be part of the pilot program. Where it broke down, was when they started asking for financial information […] we weren't comfortable giving away our information. We never will be.

On incompatible timelines…

It's hard for us to start hiring earlier, in terms of the risk of hiring people that we don't have an immediate need for…. You would be running a bench and it burns cash like crazy. If I knew that 50% of my pipeline needed X, then even then I could take a risk and hire to the bench. Knowing 2 weeks in a good situation or 8 weeks in a bad situation, but I just don't have that volume within a specific skillset that we can do that. It's too risky. It's too diverse.

On not proceeding with immigration…

We're still struggling. We're still not filling the positions that we need to have filled. And the people we do have are working more than they probably want to most weeks in order for us to keep up. We have had to turn work away because we don't have enough people. The growth strategy that we had. Without the people to do the work, you are basically just treading water. Not growing, but not sinking. But, we'd rather do what we do well, than take on work that we can actually handle.
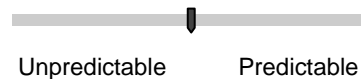
Taylor White – Hopeful First Timer

Early in the process of hiring/settling intentional immigrant hires. Simultaneously optimistic and anxious about international hiring as a recruitment strategy

Company White Fabrications

Position Operations Manager

Hiring Needs

Unpredictable — Predictable

Support Network

Limited

Initial Exposure

Seeing other businesses hiring

Challenges

Upfront cost (time & money)

Knowing where to hire from

Risk of hiring unseen

Unpredictable timelines

Preparing for settlement

Overwhelming number of enquiries

Enablers

Knowing immigration has worked for others

Awareness of peers' settlement strategies

HR consultant

On immigration process…

The whole process is a little scary, because you have to go through this whole process and you have never met them. So it's difficult to say if they're the right fit… and it's not a guarantee that the people from around here are the right fit, there's just a lot of extra process and extra steps in between.

On settlement…

It's a lot bigger job than… the mindset is… they're coming here to work, great. They come here and now they are part of society and paying taxes and that's wonderful. But there's a whole lot more to it than that. They come with just their suitcases, I'm going to have to find them a fully furnished flat or help them furnish. That's going to fall to me.

On motive to use immigration…

Of course I was in desperation mode when I finally got through the AIPP process. Things were super busy. The HR consultant asked me, 'what is your criteria for hiring' and I said 'please don't laugh at me but this is what I have come to… they need to breathe air, show up every day on time, and walk with purpose.' Those are my three things I'm looking for. And it's sad to say, but it's the truth. This day and age, just finding people who show up on time is a challenge.

On AIPP Cold Calls…

We are being bombarded with folks who are coming to ask because they know we are designated for the AIPP. We don't feel equipped to address the questions that are coming in.

I get the sense that there are people that are sending resumes to everyone on this list. 90% of the resumes I am getting sent are not related at all to our industry.
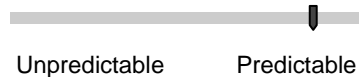
Jasmine Ng – Strategic Super User

Considers immigration to be a core recruitment strategy. Feels well supported by internal team, and strong relationship with govt and settlement agencies.

Company Maritime Haulage

Position Director of HR

Hiring Needs

Unpredictable   Predictable

Support Network

Strong

Initial Exposure

International student hires

Challenges

Overwhelming number of enquiries/applicants

Time required to support settlement

Enablers

Team approach:

- *Internal*
- *HR consultant*
- *Immigration officers*
- *Multicultural association*
- *Peers*

Internal tools & strategies:

- *Process flowchart*
- *Facebook page*
- *Social events*

On immigration process…

*We knew that immigration was **not going to be a quick fix**. We knew that this was something that would take time before we saw our return-on-investment and we were willing to invest our time on that.*

On settlement…

*We're trying to bring two new Canadians at a time, **so that they don't have to go through the settlement process alone**. Like, the training can take a month if not longer. We're trying to build relationships between the newcomers, so that at least they have someone to say, "I'm struggling with this".*

On getting started…

*Find a contact person in government, reach out to the multicultural association, and call other companies who have been using immigration. Find out best and worst practices. You can **learn from other people's mistakes**. You don't have to make those same mistakes.*

On AIPP Cold Calls…

The emails from potential candidates are overwhelming. *The amount of emails that you get from candidates on a daily basis. I would easily get 75 to 80 emails a day that I have to answer just in regards to the AIPP.*

Opportunities

The insights gained into the employer experience of immigration point to several areas of opportunity for innovation:

1. How might we make immigration a viable option for companies with unpredictable hiring needs and cycles?

    - *E.g., By reduce unpredictability, creating strategies to deal with unpredictability, and/or accelerating the hiring/immigration process…*

2. How might we minimise the administrative overhead for first-time employers?

    - *E.g., By reducing amount of overhead, explaining rationale, and/or increasing services provided upfront (pre-designation)…*

3. How might we de-risk the hiring of immigrants?

    - *E.g., By addressing actual or perceived risk, accelerating onboarding, reducing initial commitment, reducing cost, and/or increasing benefit…*

4. How might we increase the social capital of SMEs to better support their journey of finding, hiring, and/or settling immigrants?

    - *E.g., Via business peers, community, and/or immigration mentorship…*

5. How might we reduce the burden of AIPP cold calls?

    - *E.g., By reducing number, standardising messaging, rerouting, and/or collective harvesting…*

6. How might we leverage lessons learned for employers of various scale, immigration expertise, and complexity of hiring needs?

    - *E.g., Via toolkits, and/or community of practice…*

7. How might we reduce the burden of settlement for employers of various scales and resources?

    - *E.g., Via community partnerships, and/or train the trainer models…*

8. How might we amplify the frequency of unintentional immigrant hires to promote immigration as a worthwhile recruitment strategy?

    - *E.g., By raising profile of newcomers who are already in NB, and/or creating a "bumping ground" to increase chances of making social connections between employers and newcomers…*

9. How might we celebrate and bring attention to employers who are immigration champions?

    - *E.g., Via awards, testimonials, and/or general media coverage…*

Conclusion

The personas, insights, and opportunities presented in this document can be used to inform strategic decisions about which employers to target and highlight opportunities most relevant to them.

Those concerned with improving the experience of existing users of immigration services may choose to focus on exploring ways to reduce the burden of settlement and/or the problem of designated employers becoming overwhelmed with enquiries about the AIPP. Those concerned with increasing the accessibility of immigration for SMEs, may choose to focus efforts on reducing barriers for SMEs who have relatively predictable hiring needs before exploring efforts to address the additional challenges faced by those like Pete Spencer (Stalled Immigration Champion) with unpredictable and ultimately urgent hiring needs.

We acknowledge that the findings presented in this document are by no means exhaustive, they are based on interviews with a small sample of employers who have previously interacted with the Population Growth Department. Design research is not intended to create generalizable findings, but rather provide enough insight to inspire new ways of thinking about a problem and their potential solutions. Solutions can then be iteratively prototyped and tested with users that align with the priority persona; eventually being validated at scale.

We look forward to meeting to discuss the findings presented in this document and their implications for the design of employer support services.