

Immigrant Onboarding in Non-Gateway Quebec Small to Medium Enterprises

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Research Problem: Manufacturing small to medium enterprises (SMEs) outside of the gateway cities of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver are turning to immigrants and temporary foreign workers to fill a labour shortage. This study investigated their onboarding programs, strategies to attract, integrate and retain, this source of labour and their perceived efficacy from the perspectives of executives, managers/supervisors and immigrant and non-immigrant workers to identify stakeholders' support and training needs.

Research Questions:

1. What onboarding strategies do non-gateway manufacturing SMEs use to recruit train and retain immigrant employees with technical or trade skills?
2. What are the perceived challenges that non-gateway manufacturing SMEs encounter when trying to recruit, train and retain immigrant employees with technical or trade skills?
3. How do non-gateway manufacturing SMEs see immigrants as meeting their labour needs and what drives this vision?
4. What are non-gateway manufacturing SMEs perceptions of government policies, and the immigrant integration services available to them and what additional support do they need to successfully onboard immigrant employees with technical or trade skills?
5. What are the onboarding experiences and challenges of immigrants with technical or trade skills in non-gateway SME manufacturing companies?

Methodology: Four manufacturing SMEs from different regions in the province of Quebec participated. Three forms of data were collected. First, in-depth qualitative First, 60 to 90

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minute in-depth qualitative were conducted with six to eight employees per case, for a total of 28 participants. Hermeneutical phenomenological interviews are structured into three parts: i) exploring: the life history of the participant as it relates to the phenomenon in question, ii) participants' experiences with onboarding new immigrant employees in the context of the company and iii) a reflection and interpretation of the lived experiences discussed in the second part of the interview and contextualized by the first part of the interview.

Second, company onboarding and community integration service artefacts were collected. Artefacts collected from managers and employees included sample job descriptions, job advertisements, diversity statements, orientation materials, performance assessments, feedback charts used by supervisors, career planning, and company training investments. Company website artefacts included: the mission statement, their philosophy and or values, the general description of the company, descriptions of products, product advertisement, descriptions of key employees, years in existence, clientele and partners and explicit commitment to diversity. Artefacts concerning the welcoming services offered were collected from the town's official website, websites of immigrant integration service providers in the area, housing websites and job search websites

Last, field notes were taken during and after the company tour, interviews, and the researcher's visit to the companies and communities. The field notes took the form of written observations and personal reflections concerning the physical environment and aspects of the people that may not be captured in audio-recorded interviews.

Results and Conclusions:

Results indicate the onboarding programs are a cyclical learning process, framed by a culture of organizational learning, communication, and teamwork, and training is required for both incoming and existing workers. These strategies improve retention among immigrants, particularly those who value opportunities for learning and professional development.

The results can serve non-gateway manufacturing SMEs, Human Resources, local, provincial and federal policymakers and chambers of commerce and government and non-government organizations that serve immigrants and/or employers. Stakeholders can improve the attraction, economic and social integration, and retention of immigrants through the *Bienvenue Onboard* model that emerged from this study. The model is adapted to the respective needs of immigrants and temporary foreign workers, and consists of seven cyclical steps: i) Prepare an action plan, ii) advertise and recruit strategically, iii) prepare existing and incoming staff, iv) offer workplace and job orientation programs, v) offer social integration support, vi) follow-up with further investments in people and vii) evaluate the onboarding experience. Implications for Workforce Equity Diversity and Inclusion are that companies better equipped to integrate and retain immigrant workers are those who:

- Adopt a wide definition of diversity in their EDI programs, relate EDI to other company policies and emphasize common goals and company values.
- Hire workers from different countries to have an ethnically diverse workforce to avoid an ethnically dichotomous workplace with tensions across cultural lines.
- Train employees with a focus on specific onboarding needs and relational aspects rather than cultural competencies.

- Recognize foreign education credentials and work experience that are not part of a regulated professional order when determining employees' salary.