⑤ FAQ: Integration and Retention Programs

Learn more about the importance of Integration and Retention programs for ICT employers.

1) What are integration and retention programs? What purpose do they serve?

Measures such as onboarding, performance management and mentoring are examples of integration and retention programs. They serve several purposes: ensuring that all new recruits are provided the same opportunity to be productive and grow, and promoting a sense of belonging so new employees want to stay with your organization. For IEPs, such measures also provide an opportunity to learn about aspects unique to the Canadian workplace, such as sector-specific standards and regulations, nuances in language and communication and workplace norms, as well as to expand their networks.

2) Why would I introduce integration and retention programs just to benefit IEP employees?

Integration and retention programs are good practices that provide the needed supports to <u>any</u> new hires to your workplace - this can include those new to the Canadian ICT sector such as IEPs, new graduates, or employees coming from a different sector. In fact, as every workplace and company has its own unique corporate culture and ways of doing things, any new hire would benefit from these measures.

3) How important is an onboarding program, really?

Statistics show that ICT employers that do not have onboarding programs lose more employees than others during the first nine months following hiring (Carpitella 2002).[1]

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[1] ICTC. *Human Resources Management Guide*. Module IV: Induction and Orientation. P. 61.

The introduction of an onboarding strategy generally has a significant impact on employee retention, dedication, motivation and support of the corporate mission. It is therefore important to communicate to new employees as much information as possible on the organization's culture, values, philosophy and your expectations for their role and behaviour at the time of hiring. The more structured and effective the employee orientation, the better prepared they will be, and the less time it will take for them to "hit the ground running."

Furthermore, in a competitive job market, having an onboarding program allows the company to demonstrate an equitable and thorough approach to helping new employees get to know the company and its expectations. This will help new hires feel valued and welcomed, promote their integration and engagement in the company, and help reduce "revolving door syndrome."

4) *Why do employees need targeted supports to help them develop to management potential?*

Any employee that you are grooming for management will benefit from coaching, mentoring, and opportunities to build their network to enhance the skills required to advance. For high potential IEPs, keep in mind that workplace norms and legal considerations differ from culture to culture. What is a standard practice in one culture – e.g. an executive expecting to be addressed as "Mr." or "Ms." – might be considered inappropriate in another. In addition, being new in Canada, IEPs may not have the same level of access to the informal networks that are often critical to professional success. Such supports, as well as training on Canadian laws and customs can "fill in the gaps" for experienced IEPs and allow them to contribute to their full potential.

What Do People Look for in a Work Environment?
• Supportive company culture
• Opportunities for growth and advancement
• Recognition and appreciation
• Supportive work environment
• Good manager or supervisor
• Good salary
• Rewarding work
• Work/life balance
• Strong leadership
• Open communications

Source: ICTC HRM Guide

"I hired an IEP as a junior developer. After noticing his ability to 'think big picture,' I then discovered that he had been a product manager responsible for 30 people before coming to Canada! I promoted him to team leader and he has found managing small teams a 'piece of cake.'

ICT Employer

5) What might cause an IEP to leave a company?

Statistics indicate that workers from diverse backgrounds are three times more likely to leave an organization than other workers. The primary reasons for departure are a lack of integration within the organization, lack of opportunities for advancement, and the existence of cultural barriers. Often recruits from various diverse groups may have differing communication abilities, or may require accommodation for specific religious or personal matters. By addressing these matters, ICT companies have greater success at achieving optimal worker performance, and maximizing employee retention. [2]

6) How much does it cost to replace an employee who leaves?

The human resource and monetary expenses associated with repeated recruitment efforts is a significant time and cost factor for employers. Depending on level, the cost of replacing an employee can run to several times the employee's annual salary; not including costs associated with lost time, production and overtime hours required to fulfill job requirements. The intangible costs relating to harm done to staff morale and company reputation can be even more significant.

In a tight skills market, competition for employees with the right skills can be fierce. Newly-trained workers who are unhappy in their positions may be more readily poached by other companies that are willing to pay a premium for already-trained workers.

Implementing simple, inexpensive integration and retention programs and practices can be very effective in keeping talented employees.

"What I like best about my employer are the opportunities to learn – not only relating to my field, but also the ability to learn how to work with people from different cultures."

IEP in the ICT Sector

7) My company wants to make sure our new IEP hires integrate well into our workplace and want to stay, but we're an SME – what can we do with our limited budget and resources?

Informal, inexpensive measures have been shown to be perceived to be just as important and effective as formal statements and policies on diversity and respect. Examples include active and vocal engagement of senior leaders, open communication and ongoing feedback from managers, and a welcoming, inclusive organizational culture that values talent in a multiplicity of forms. [3]

In addition, the Diversity Institute of Management & Technology at Ryerson found that visible senior management commitment to diversity is a pivotal factor in how fair visible minorities, inclusive of IEPs, perceive their organization's career advancement processes to be. [4]

8) As a smaller organization, the possibilities for promotion may be more limited here. How can we help our IEPs grow and keep them interested?

Research found that individuals with foreign educational credentials employed in corporate Canada were more likely than those without to feel their education and training were being underutilized. Individuals who felt that their skills, education, and training were being underutilized reported lower levels of career satisfaction. [5]

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[2] ICTC. *Human Resources Management Guide*. Module IV: Induction and Orientation. P. 66.

[3] ICTC. *Talent for Hire: Diversifying Talent in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the ICT Sector*. April 2008. P. 28.

[4] Catalyst and Ryerson University. Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities - Survey Findings. 2007. P. 3

[5] Ibid.

What is important for all new employees, including IEP hires, is the feeling that they are given an opportunity to apply their skills, learn and grow. Unlike larger companies where roles are more defined and job descriptions are more fixed, working in a smaller firm can offer an employee more scope to apply – and enhance – his or her skills by working in multiple areas. This may be particularly attractive to IEPs who have many transferable skills that they would like to utilize, and learn how to adapt, in the Canadian workplace. Furthermore, creating an environment with continual opportunities for learning and information-sharing can be very effective in helping to retain talent. This can be achieved through offering cross-functional and stretch assignments, job shadowing and mentoring.

9) What factors contribute to the success of an integration and retention program?

Companies which have most effectively leveraged the talents of their workforce are those which have invested in systematic, comprehensive, top-down approaches to integration and retention. Effective programs require:
- Active and vocal senior management support
- Link to strategic objectives of the organization
- Reinforcement throughout operational plans in functional areas and HR strategies
- Measurable targets and accountabilities at manager level
- Employee input, engagement, and participation
- Continuous evaluation, monitoring, and improvement efforts
- Effective organizational communication of the program

IEP perceptions of career advancement:

A study by Ryerson/Catalyst on perceptions of visible minorities on career advancement found that those born outside Canada:
- were less satisfied with their careers
- were less satisfied with their progress on advancement, income, and overall career goals
- reported having few role models
- agreed that they were held to a higher standard of performance

Higher levels of career satisfaction were associated with the presence of employer programs such as mentoring and networking, career advancement practices that promote transparency, and the tracking of diversity metrics.

Catalyst and Ryerson University. Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities - Survey Findings. 2007

10) We must be doing something right – our workforce is already very diverse – what else do we need to do?

For many ICT firms, commitment to diversity is a "non-issue" – their commitment is to talent, and talent, whether diverse or not, is respected, encouraged and promoted. [6]

As a result, while many ICT companies have a diverse workforce, not as many have made a commitment to creating an inclusive workplace. Implementing practices to make all employees feel included, valued and respected will greatly contribute to retention.

[1] ICTC. *Talent for Hire: Diversifying Talent in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the ICT Sector.* April 2008. P. 19.