innovative intercultural solutions

Immersion to Integration

Internationally Educated Professional Performance Gaps

The most common performance gaps in Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs) identified in the Immersion to Integration Phase 2 project not only relate to English language ability but also factor in interpersonal communication skills, initiating, managing time, establishing credibility and building rapport. The lists below are not exhaustive but the gaps below have been marked as patterns common to many organizations and sectors that recruit IEPs. The causes are commonly cultural and language, although personality factors do contribute significantly to performance, learning and change. Most of these are listed as "What may need to be taught or learned to achieve…Benchmark Competencies at Stage III", page 113 of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 edition by Grazyna Pawlikowska-Smith.

Cultural characteristics are observable tendencies, not stereotypes. These observable tendencies are points of departure, or partial answers to the complexity of the human experience. Personality, gender, generation, language skills, and context need to be taken into account to avoid assumptions and suspend impulsive judgments. Moreover, sub-ethnic, urban-rural origin, socio-economic status, educational attainment, professional level and personal journey also affect adherence to mainstream cultural norms.

English Skills	Common Gap Indicators	Common Causes	Effects in Organization
Pronunciation	Individual words are not intelligible; messages in sentences are incomprehensible.	Specific English sounds are unfamiliar; speaking speed is different. First language habits carry into English.	Diminished client and team confidence in the IEPs professional projection.
Listening	Follows the gist but difficulty in following complex instructions, questions, ideas, and conversation threads in meetings and phone calls.	Overly dependent on using passive mechanisms like TV and radio to enhance listening without concentrated sustained effort in study and innovative exercises.	Misunderstandings and mistakes are caught too late to stop impact on timelines and costs.

Writing	Has control over common sentences but has difficulty with complex ideas, naturalness of phrases and expressions, tone, style and organization.	Perception that having being recruited, competence is assumed. The reality of continuous learning, especially in soft skills, is implicit in Canadian orgs and not present in most developing nations where IEPS come from.	Messages are misunderstood. Attitudes are misattributed. Diminished client and team confidence in the IEPs professional projection.
Speaking	Has a limited inventory of words. Hesitations and pauses impede communication. Cannot synthesize and explain abstract complex ideas. Inability to hypothesize or explain concrete ideas logically.	Perception that having being recruited, competence is assumed. Standard ESL courses often do not provide useful content for work nor the strategies for self-directed study of English.	Information (life blood of organization) is not free-flowing

Communication Skills	Common Gap Indicators	Common Causes	Business Effects
Interpersonal	Too prescriptive, directive, or aggressive; lacking assertiveness	Cultural communication style has a more direct, concise and intellectual approach to confrontation versus relational; or cultural approach values harmony, deference and face saving.	Reduces workplace harmony and team cohesion. Error is not corrected enough and/or moving from better to 'best" is missed.

Presentations			
	Formal-informal presentations and updates are incoherent-confusing; lacking in sufficient content; approach and language are too academic.	Cultural communication style is more indirect, circular, and relational. Higher expectations of contribution are norms of a less-hierarchical culture. Jargon is meant to show credibility whereas clear and simple language is preferred in mainstream.	Confidence is eroded in professional abilities. Limitations to growth and org capacity. Imbalance of workload distribution.

Initiating	Common Gap Indicators	Common Causes	Business Effects
Managing Learning	Not integrating-applying new knowledge to subsequent work. Asking same questions repeatedly. Lacking enthusiasm to learn and develop.	Lacking an intentional learning plan-strategy. Lack of essential temporary or longer-term organization accountability structures. Stage of life, family obligations, settlement issues.	Repeating same errors Inefficient use of time and resources. Quality-safety are not enhanced. Confidence in abilities is absent. Future professional opportunities are limited
Contributing	Not jumping in at meetings to contribute skill-knowledge. Going with the flow.	Familiarity with hierarchical org structures tend to demand less contribution and more deferring to leadership. Lack of skill in organizing knowledge in English or finding words.	Lack of pro-activeness and contribution to teams reduces or constrains a sense of trust in a person's abilities and opportunities to grow as org grows.

Requesting	Waiting for instructions-work. Not taking responsibility to find out macro-level of project. Not seeking clarification on issues, tasks or instructions.	Hierarchical organizational structure create different expectations on employees. Mutual of self-face saving, or the inability to choose the correct words for the right tone to show respect.	Potential of professionals' ability to contribute is not maximized. Limits organization's ability to value knowledge participation versus just obtaining labour.

Managing Time	Common Gap Indicators	Common Causes	Business Effects
Deadlines	Not meeting deadlines Exaggerated sense of control over work	Cultural perceptions of how time is used. Analytical personality types tend to need more time.	Impact on cost and peer work loads-responsibilities

Establishing Credibility	Common Gap Indicators	Common Causes	Business Effects
Education and Experience	Not working collaboratively-respectfully with less educated team members. Seeking a position commensurate with education versus experience and soft skills	Lack of understanding what variables build credibility in Canadian organizations such as ability to build and maintain consensus, use mitigating language and degrees of certainty effectively.	Reduces workplace harmony and team cohesion. Limitations to work-team allocations. Respect is not reciprocal and trust is eroded

Handling Feedback			
	Resistant-argumentative to constructive feedback. Only corrects a portion of errors.	Lack of understanding of how to build credibility and manage personal errors. Not understanding how error is seen as connected with learning.	Inflexibility limits project-work allocations. Quality-safety are not enhanced.

Building Rapport	Common Gap Indicators	Common Causes	Business Effects
Interpersonal Relations	Isolating, non-participatory, shy, submissive, hard to read. Bossy, pushy, argumentative, intransigent.	Personality can contribute to other factors such as culture where communication styles are different, credibility and rapport are built differently, or hierarchy is active when power distances are present.	Reduces team cohesion Individuals and teams are not "in-the-know" Reduces opportunities for experience-growth