



**NorQuest College  
Centre for Excellence in Intercultural Education**

**From Immersion to Integration Phase 2 Report**

**Funded by Alberta Employment and Immigration**

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## **Purpose**

The Immersion to Integration: Beyond Access project (Phase 2) focused on the issue of organizational integration for internationally educated professionals (IEPs) in two organizations actively employing engineers with education and experience outside of Canada. Through applied research and training activities the Centre for Excellence in Intercultural Education applied an Organizational Integration Model to improve the integration process that IEPs experience and equip organizations to intentionally facilitate their integration. The goal for the project was to support IEPs to become more mobile and visible within the organization through increased pragmatic competence for IEPs and increased intercultural competence for organizational leadership and teams.

The definition of integration for the “From Immersion to Integration” project is the ability of an IEP to communicate proficiently in English and to be able to operate effectively at three levels.

He or she needs to be able to:

1. be aware of and operate congruently with mainstream cultural norms;
2. recognize and interpret alternative cultural norms within a multicultural workplace; and
3. manage and maintain integrity to his or her personal cultural norms of behavior.

The project was guided by two research questions:

1. What limits the mobility of IEPs in an organization?
2. What supports would contribute the most to an IEP’s integration into an organization?

## **Activities**

Project activities included:

1. Research and development of the Personal Management course to address pragmatic language skills and the language of leadership.
2. Delivery of personal management training for IEPs and delivery of intercultural training for organization leaders and teams. (approximately 750 participants in intercultural training and 45 participants in personal management training)
3. Evaluation of impact related to language, intercultural and interpersonal skills for leadership
4. Research on issues that limit the mobility of IEPs, perceived performance gaps for IEPs and performance expectations of organizational leaders and the effectiveness of supports (training, L1 to L2 coaching) provided through the project.



**Outcomes**

**75% of native and non-native speakers express satisfaction through evaluations**

Satisfaction for the company-wide intercultural training was demonstrated through a more than 75% satisfaction rate in the post-workshop surveys. Post-workshop interviews with HR managers and senior leadership teams at both CoSyn and Landmark confirmed overall satisfaction with the training.

Satisfaction increased between the first and second offering of the Personal Management course. We believe this reflected the improvement of the learning experience following changes made to the second offering to focus on pragmatics first and then the language of leadership. In the first offering, these topics were combined. Feedback from participants in the first offering and observations by the project team indicated greater attention was needed on pragmatic language before that knowledge could be applied to understanding the language of leadership.

**70% of IEP’s have increased one Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level**

The Personal Management course was customized to meet the specific organizational need—pragmatic competency. The CLB framework was not directly referenced to assess language competence development. Instead, a Discourse Completion Task assessment tool was developed used to assess pragmatic competency. The Personal Management course outcomes were mapped to CLB levels.

<b>Personal Management: Language of Leadership Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Canadian Language Benchmarks Strategies to Develop between Benchmarks 5-8 (Stage II)</b>
Seek ongoing learning in professionally acceptable ways	Knowledge of sociolinguistic norms culturally determined behaviour and interactional and interpersonal communication skills. (e.g., giving and receiving compliments or invitations)
Apologize and save face when wrong. Saving other’s face when right.	Knowledge of situational “scripts” and corresponding oral discourse formats for particular academic, work or community events (e.g., specific workplace situations)
Use soft skills to challenge and contribute ideas in negotiation and brainstorming and to demonstrate support for ideas	Collaborative team skills for academic and work purposes (e.g., contributing to verbal problem solving and decision making in group settings)

**75% of IGE workshop participants will have developed in language, intercultural and interpersonal skills for leadership**

Exit surveys from both offerings of the Personal Management Course indicated positive results for language, intercultural and interpersonal skills gains for leadership. The following table is a representation of items on a post-course questionnaire administered to pilot participants in both the first and second pilots. The awareness of *knowledge* of Canadian workplace language use (item 3) is



different from being able to transfer that knowledge to behaviour (item 4); a more challenging type of change. During the first pilot, instructors were attempting to cover both leadership competencies and pragmatic language use. This bulk of content did not allow for a more focused discussion of the complexity involved in knowledge to behaviour transfer. The drop in percentages in from the pilot group 1 to pilot group 2 in item 4 could be explained by the increased instructional emphasis on appropriate language use by IEPs at work and their subsequent recognition of the complexity of integrating these values and language use into their daily workplace tasks. The first pilot group may not have fully grasped the complexity of this type of knowledge to skill transfer.

	Question	PM Offering 1 (Strong agree/agree) n=14	PM Offering 2 (Strongly agree/agree) n=11
1.	Because of this workshop, I am more prepared to notice appropriate language in the workplace.	93%	100%
2.	I recognize there are differences in how people from different cultures approach teamwork.	93%	100%
3.	Because of this workshop, I feel I know enough about my own culture to be able to shift substantially to a mainstream Canadian way of thinking	79%	90%
4.	Because of this workshop, I feel I can change my behaviour in a natural way to express a mainstream Canadian way of thinking	86%	82%
5.	I feel better equipped to use these leadership principles in my professional life	79%	91%

### Pragmatics

60% of the participants showed significant improvement in the analysis of discourse completion tasks (DCT) which were administered by the instructors' to assess the level of socially-appropriate language use by pilot participants. A discourse completion task is a description of a workplace scenario to which learners are expected to respond (in writing) to the communication needs of the scenario. Examples of DCTs used in this project were:

- Interrupt their leader in his or her office (door open) to get feedback on a project proposal.
- Disagreeing with the project manager on the decided course of action of hiring new project employees.
- Giving feedback to a subordinate on a critical project error.

A further 75% were then able to explain how this would impact a cross-cultural relationship involving power (e.g., where a subordinate spoke inappropriately to his supervisor thereby damaging their relationship).



All participants improved on discourse completion tasks (DCTs) which highlight an authentic workplace scenario. 100% of those who completed the activity were able to use soft skills in their written message with insightful comments related to key learning goals in cultural competence building (e.g., individualist/collectivist cultural distinctions and differences in direct and indirect communication).

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Code and Frame Shifting**

The project team found that for IEPs to learn the Canadian way to communicate and work effectively together, there is a need to develop both the ability to change language use and behavior (ie code shift) so the intended impact is achieved in the Canadian workplace context. For leadership development to occur, IEPs also need to learn why the changes in the behavior or language use works (ie frame shift). Both surface and deep learning are why change in behavior works through the Personal Management course.

### **Performance Gaps for IEPs**

Seven core leadership skills were identified in the project as common competencies expected by organizational leaders that were identified as not being fulfilled by some IEPs in the organization.

1. Managing Knowledge (and Expertise) (e.g. seeking feedback, suggestions, etc.)
2. Managing Error (managing personal/peer/client error)
3. Managing Complexity (using language of ambiguity)
4. Managing Compliance (e.g. raising issue of concern with superior or client)
5. Managing Continuous Learning (and English Language Development) (e.g. self-directed language planning and learning)
6. Managing Diversity (interpersonal relations, showing respect in the workplace)
7. Personal Management (e.g. handling ambiguity, avoiding and handling high risk, etc.)

### **Competencies Required for Leadership Eligibility**

English language pragmatics is critical to integration into the Canadian workplace and the functions of relating to leaders and leading others. Although pragmatics is present in every language, it has significant socio-cultural variables that make it critical to function effectively in the professional Alberta workplace. These expectations for using context-effective pragmatics correlate with higher Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) levels that are more difficult to master and which have fewer comprehensive curricula and materials to date. The less-hierarchical structure of most of the professional Canadian private and public workplaces requires the use of a communication style that is less dependent on hierarchical power and more fluent in contextual pragmatics. It also requires a level of initiative to match the unwritten expectation for employees to be more self-directed.



## **Recommendations**

If IEPs are going to be successful in relating to leaders and in assuming leadership positions in a Canadian multicultural organization, they will need to become proficient in pragmatic language and leadership skills that support Canadian workplace norms that have emerged out of a less-hierarchical organizational structure. In particular, communication needs to be more active and more persuasive, and initiative needs to be forthcoming.

If IEPs are to be supported in their development within the organization and ultimately aim for roles and responsibilities that demand higher language skills and intercultural competencies, explicit and ongoing communication must occur between IEPs and the organization's senior leadership teams on performance expectations. Organizational leaders need to clearly and concretely articulate in interculturally competent ways their performance expectations. If performance expectations and their rationales are not clearly articulated, they will remain mostly implicit embedded "cultural norms" which IEPs may not uncover and their performance gaps will likely persist.

The senior leadership teams who oversee and work together with IEPs on their annual performance appraisals also need a comprehensive understanding of the challenges IEPs experience. They will be able to better collaborate to determine the root cause(s) and suggest the appropriate course of action to close the gaps, support IEP developmental opportunities, and enhance business functions.

Once EWP courses are in place, L1 coaches have been equipped and senior leadership is trained, organizations that are highly multicultural would benefit from providing communication and cultural diversity training to all their employees so that the implicit norms are made explicit, differences are more easily recognized and diversity can be leveraged wherever possible.

Discourse Completion Tasks and the development of models such as the Building Consensus (A-F) Model are essential in helping IEPs navigate the implicit rules of pragmatic competence (soft skills) so essential to building and maintaining relationships in mainstream Canadian professional workplaces. The combined effects of controlled, in-session repetition, with workplace practice allows for an experiential affirmation of the relational effects of pragmatic competency, and increased confidence through increased success in "real-world" contexts. The Building Consensus (A-F) Model only breaks down the speech acts of agreeing/ disagreeing and building consensus. Clearly there are more speech acts associated with the perceived leadership competencies identified through this project that need to be researched and analyzed to the same effect. This would allow for newcomers to experience the cognitive frame-shifting and behavioural code-shifting required for successful integration into Canadian workplaces.

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