

GETTING REAL

Stewart Forsyth takes a look at the realities of the job market for migrant workers and suggests they can help a talent-starved business. He also checks out some realities about psychometric testing.



Quality staff

I am finding it very difficult to find and hire quality staff. Do you have any creative ideas?

Actually the question was: 'What can you suggest for a friend with a recognised qualification and a foreign looking name who can't seem to get a job?' But this got me thinking about a possible opportunity for talent-starved businesses.

We know that unemployment is low, skill-gaps a significant brake on growth, and that it is frustrating trying to find good people. And we know that there are talented new Kiwis who are unemployed or under-employed. Is this an opportunity?

Why does it take 18 months until migrants are likely to be in a job? Why do many migrants report that there are limited job opportunities? My views:

- Active screening out by agencies. Research carried out last year showed that having a Chinese name on your CV meant technology recruiters were less likely to actively follow you up;
- Psychological similarity. There is evidence that Kiwis who make hiring decisions see people from Australia, Britain and South Africa as both more similar and more hireable than those from India, China or the Pacific Islands;
- Limited networks. Most jobs are found through friends of

friends. New migrants have smaller networks, biased to other migrants, without the connections through which job leads flow;

- Inappropriate marketing and promotion. The migrant's CV and phone style are not what those doing hiring might expect;
- They can't speak English. This is often a style and accent thing. Try going to Mumbai, New Orleans, Hong Kong or Amsterdam and you'll find that it only takes a day or so to tune your ear to the local version of English;
- Some migrants might have a different 'work style'. This is contentious, but given that Kiwis work some of the longest hours in the world and that many of our workers prefer an autonomous work-style, it is possible that some migrants may be a little lower on these work style factors.

To return to my third question: is this an opportunity? I think it is. You could do well by developing strategies for selecting talent from new migrants. You will need to invest in:

- Links into migrant groups—possibly using community leaders;
- Screen more on job-relevant abilities and traits (which are universal);
- Spend time on induction—NZ English skills, clear

expectations and coaching around work style, some cultural survival hints (eg, 'Don't call during the game').

In turn you will get an advantage in recruiting talent. Is that a good deal?

Test case

I am in the process of applying for a middle-management role, and have been asked to complete a battery of psych tests. I had to log into the careers site of the company concerned, and download 11 different psychometric tests. I am expected to get through these in one hour, however it took me nearly three hours to get through seven of them last night. I had to stop as I was mentally exhausted, only to discover it doesn't save what you've done! Is this test over-kill? Do these tests have any integrity?

It sounds as if this test user is breaking some of the simple rules of test use in not giving you a realistic briefing. Here are some more testing points:

- Are the tests reliable and valid in the particular organisational context? The organisation should at least be systematically collecting their 'local' data (both test

results and performance and competency results) to answer these questions, while being able to refer to 'meta-studies' showing the technical standards of the tests in New Zealand.

- Are you being compared with the appropriate reference group? The test results should be compared with relevant norms.
- Is the person managing the process (and ideally giving you feedback and writing the report) trained in the use of these tests. It is not necessary for them to be a psychologist, but they should have completed test accreditation. This is some guide as to whether the results will be used appropriately.

Your questions when you go to the feedback session:

- What is the evidence that the tests are valid in this organisation?
- Who am I being compared with? What are the selection cut-off scores, and how were they derived?
- What are your qualifications?
- And, what allowance is made for the fact that I completed these tests in less than optimal conditions? **et**

Stewart Forsyth has worked as a consultant and HR manager. He currently runs FX Consultants (www.fxc.co.nz), specialists in creative approaches to lifting business performance through improving people's contribution. Thanks to Prof Colleen Ward (Chinese names on CVs) and Kim Coates (psychological similarity) for their research on the job opportunities of migrants.