



The Migrant Worker's productive undertaking in the Global Workplace

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ABSTRACT

This research work titled "The Migrant Worker's productive undertaking in the Global Workplace" is a contemporary reflection of workplace diversity seen from an emerging market perspective. It firstly explains the movement of migrant labour from former colonised nations of the British Empire to fill in job needed in England and portrays the need for rich countries to send their skilled workers to developing nations. It states that migrant labour or the brain drain from developing economies constitutes a major gain for rich countries. The migrant worker is viewed as an asset for countries needing such labour but is usually subject to discrimination that might be a reason to hamper the movement. Getting into the academic perspective of the research, this work considers the perspectives of migration from the point of view of acculturation and the urgency to value foreign labour. Three perspectives of migration are: the demographic-descriptive, the pragmatic-political and the ideological-normative while each one has its relative importance in the society concerned. These views might be contradicted by today's moves of industrialised nations that want to take measures against illegal immigration but nevertheless assume that migrant labour has to be accepted as part of the contemporary workplace diversity.

Key words: migrant labour; movement; diversity; workplace

1.0 Introduction

An important aspect of workplace diversity is the foreign or migrant worker. Such a worker is defined as somebody who comes from a different country to work in a host country. This was quite common in the past where earlier colonists needed labour and they called

for foreign labour through their own colonies. For example, the British Commonwealth countries comprised 52 colonies and the United Kingdom could find a pool of labour from its earlier dependencies. This practice worked out in areas like the military or nursing and eventually spread to other areas, more particularly, where labour was scarce. This could apply to catering services, working in retail companies, etc. This also occurred in France which invited its own people living in its former colonies namely Algeria, Morocco and parts of the French-speaking African nations.

Migrant labour was needed in jobs that were lowly-valued by the local people. As the rich countries progressed economically, there was an upward mobility in classes and jobs chosen by the local people while lesser important jobs could be taken up by people coming from the developing world in quest for better living in Europe or America where "the grass looked to be greener." This perception still exists in some poorer parts of sub-Saharan Africa where people want to flee poor living conditions and move to Europe where they can be free from persecution, genocide and other ills of society. The impending war issue in Syria has caused the displacement of millions of Syrians across the border. At the same time, it has caused a lot of inconvenience to the neighbouring countries.

In a similar way, the scenario has affected the past colonial powers like England, France, Spain or Portugal, the latter to a lesser extent. These countries that boasted high levels of economic prosperity are now in dire difficulties with slow economic growth, high levels of unemployment and a more fragile social structure with regards to the threat of terrorism. England and France were among the first nations to start thinking critically of immigration by restricting entry to migrants



following campaigns made by opposition parties that rallied with the dissatisfaction expressed by local people in terms of employment opportunities. This measure might be in favour of the past colonial powers but has been the source of illegal immigration from poor people who still put it in mind that Europe is still an Eldorado for them in case if they cross the Old Continent's borders. The problem faces directly Italy where people from sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, Eritrea, flock to mainland Europe through this country. The same applies to the Moroccan border that looks upon neighbouring Spain and where lots of illegal immigrants are in the wait for better living standards.

Clearly, immigration has become an issue of contest in Europe or in the United States where the entry of foreign people poses a problem. The USA offers a "green card" to attract people while Europe is more in favour of selective immigration as a means of attracting talented labour and not unskilled labour. This conversely affects the developing nations where there is a brain drain of talented people who are more economically better off in their new country compared to their homeland.

The issue of migrant workers has an impact on diversity. Although, they might be looked down upon by the home people as "invaders" and potential job seekers, foreign labour can be both a necessity and evil. Right-winged groups like the Front National in France and similar ones throughout Europe may go against immigration but this might be needed. Some European nations like Germany or Italy have a growing ageing population and they need young people for jobs that cannot be undertaken by the local people. In such sectors, migrant labour is needed and adds to diversity in terms of talent and skills that could be needed in Europe. An argument could be how to effectively manage foreign labour and not think of exploiting it for meagre salaries and indecent work conditions.

1.1 The importance of migrant labour

The movement of people can be considered from different perspectives. Traditionally, people from poorer nations leave their home country to work in richer environments. They

can be termed as migrant workers. Migrant workers are considered an economic utility, especially for secondary labour markets such as that of long-term care. The dynamics of migrant workers across the globe are governed by interacting macro, state level, and micro, personal level, factors. On the macro level immigration policies, historical and current political and economic links between countries play a crucial part in such dynamics [1]. There is also a reversal in worker movement where top managers from the rich countries might in turn move to the emerging economies. The case mentioned in the next paragraph illustrates the first tendency of immigration.

1.2 From the Commonwealth to the United Kingdom

An important aspect of foreign workers in United Kingdom's history of immigration can be recalled from the mass movement of people from Commonwealth nations-earlier dependencies or colonies of the UK-to England in the 1960s. Earlier, the British government encouraged the enrolment of foreign workers in the form of military assistance to their coloniser during the Second World War. Pioneers from Mauritius assisted the British Infantries in Egypt, Sudan, Kenya and some other strategic locations in Northern Africa.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the UK had often met labour shortages by recruiting from the Commonwealth, countries formerly part of the British Empire [2]. In 1963 the Conservative Health Minister, Enoch Powell, launched a campaign to recruit trained doctors from overseas to fill the manpower shortages caused by National Health and Safety (NHS) expansion. Some 18,000 of them were recruited from India and Pakistan. Powell praised these doctors, who he said, "provide a useful and substantial reinforcement of the staffing of our hospitals and who are an advertisement to the world of British medicine and British hospitals." Many of those recruited had several years of experience in their home countries and arrived to gain further medical experience, training, or qualification. In 1968, the recruitment of overseas doctors was fuelled again by the predictions of further medical



shortages by the Todd Committee, which recommended expanding medical schools [3]. Jones and Snow (2011) argue that exceptions to immigration controls were made for essential and well-qualified staff, hence both nurses and doctors were exempt from the immigration controls imposed in the 1960s [4]. In general, the men and women who came to work in the NHS were welcomed throughout this period of political agitation. Their professional status distinguished them from the mass of migrants, most of whom were classified as unskilled. In spite of his later vocal opposition to black and Asian immigration in general, Health Minister Enoch Powell championed the recruitment of overseas nurses in the early 1960s.

As historian of the NHS, Charles Webster suggests, this apparent anomaly was perhaps because the immigration of nurses not only “provided a plentiful supply of cheap labour, reduced wastage, and undermined the shortage argument” but also “strengthened his hand in pressing for a strong line against the nurses’ pay claim, which itself was his chief weapon in his wider campaign to induce colleagues to adopt a more aggressive approach to the control of public sector pay [5]. Immigrant nurses were therefore an expedient means of providing political leverage. However, Alexis and Vydelingum (2007) found that many ‘overseas’ or migrant nurses recruited to work in the UK National Health Service (NHS) were initially motivated by desires to improve their status and prospects but were disappointed to find that career progression is not so readily available in the less professionalised social care sector [6].

Focusing on older people’s care services (by far the largest element of the care sector), the difficulties facing social care employers in the UK and the options taken up by some to recruit migrant workers are frequently reported [7].

1.3 From rich countries to emerging economies

Another tendency might be the movement of top managers or executives to the East. The fact that China has grown by more than 150% over the past fifteen years makes it become a prospective ground for foreign managers.

Consider Dubai as a top destination for business in the United Arab Emirates and see how they are willing to accommodate foreign workers in their environment that could be considered world class but stands well in the developing part of the world.

Chinese companies are hiring more and more western and western-trained executives — and at an increasingly senior level. Ivo Hahn, the boss of Xecutive, a headhunting firm based in Hong Kong, has placed 20 such individuals with mainland firms in the last year, compared with none at all the year before. Diana Yang, at the Beijing office of Hewitt, a human-resources consultancy, says Chinese companies have become more aggressive at hiring expatriates for top jobs as well as for technical positions. “The Chinese have the will and the cash to attract western talent,” says James Harris, managing director for China at Hays Executive, Britain’s biggest recruitment company [8].

Top managers at western companies, on the other hand, had few incentives until recently to jump ship. That they are starting to do so reflects two things. First, Chinese firms are becoming more respectable: some, such as CNOOC, Baosteel and Lenovo, are among their industries’ global elite. Second, a growing number of foreign managers, many of whom have worked in China for years, are excited about the country’s future and want to stay.

Western multinationals are investing ever bigger hopes in emerging markets. They regard them as sources of economic growth and high-quality brainpower, both of which they desperately need. Multinationals expect about 70% of the world’s growth over the next few years to come from emerging markets, with 40% coming from just two countries, China and India. They have also noted that China and to a lesser extent India have been pouring resources into education over the past couple of decades. China produces 75,000 people with higher degrees in engineering or computer science and India 60,000 every year [9].

1.4 India and migrant labour

Compared to China, India has beforehand allowed the migration of foreign executives to its economy. The tragedy of Union Carbide



(1984) points out the existence of foreign business in that important emerging market [10]. Nowadays, through the development of its information and communications technology (ICT) sector, Indian companies are more open to western management ideas and bring their knowledge and culture to their business. In the same way, India high power-distance culture is either an asset or a liability for the foreign manager. A high power-distance culture means that workers prefer authoritative and hierarchical forms of management. They also respond favourably to close supervision. Managers who demonstrate a high “power figure” type of behaviour are more likely to gain the respect of subordinates. Clear and direct orders are preferred. In order to enthuse and motivate workers, clear job descriptions and detailed instructions are needed [11]. There are interesting facts about Indians working abroad. Citehr.com reveals that Indians, although warm welcoming to foreign labour are doing quite well abroad while having integrated the international workforce.

Table 1: Facts about Indian labour in the United States

34% of MICROSOFT employees are Indians.
28% of IBM employees are Indians.
17% of INTEL employees are Indians
There are 3.22 Million Indians in America
38% of Doctors in America are Indians.
12% of Scientists in America are Indians.
36% of NASA employees are Indians

Source: Citehr.com [12]

1.5 Case Example: Rich countries woo highly skilled migrants

Rich countries are increasingly competing to recruit highly skilled immigrants to meet labour shortages in key industries like IT. But are poor countries losing out? While many countries are trying to limit the number of asylum seekers permanently settled on their shores, they are simultaneously trying to increase the number of people with specific

skills and high levels of education and skills whom they want to encourage to move there.

In Britain, for example, around two-thirds of foreign workers who came into the UK in 2002 (103,000 out of 160,000) are classified as being in professional or managerial occupations, a considerable increase compared with 10 years ago. And while definitions of what constitutes “highly skilled” varies, using the broad yardstick of being educated to degree level and above, increasing numbers of university graduates from developing countries are heading for greener pastures abroad.

According to Professor Richard Black of the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, a substantial proportion of African graduates now live outside the continent. One estimate suggests that 60% of Gambia’s university graduates, 25% of graduates from Sierra Leone, and 10% from Kenya, are now US residents.

1.5.1 Who is coming?

Highly skilled migration has always existed, of course. But until recently, it mainly consisted of high-powered bankers and multinational company executives who were seconded from one rich country to another. Now new sectors have become more prominent, and developing countries more important. The IT industry, especially in its Silicon Valley heartland in the US, has become dependent on Indian and Chinese software engineers. And the new workers are increasingly coming on a temporary or contingent basis, even in professions like accounting, with shorter assignments abroad and no guarantee of a return.

1.5.2 Competing countries

According to Professor John Salt of University College London’s Migration Research Unit, competition between countries over attracting skilled migrants has become more intense. The US and the UK have created special immigration schemes to attract them,



competing with existing schemes that have existed for some years in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

In Germany, a new “green card” scheme has been introduced to recruit foreign IT specialists and to train 250,000 domestic specialists by 2005. The new approach involves the governments working closely with employers to work out where labour shortages exist, highly tailored to specific requirements by industry — and then to fast-track admissions on a temporary basis.

California IT employers, for example, pushed hard for an expansion of the US H1B temporary visa scheme, which at its peak admitted 193,000 workers per year. Less successful have been attempts to attract entrepreneurs, with many countries offering free immigration for business people with assets over \$1m.

Source: Adapted from: *Schiffes, S. (2004) Rich countries woo highly skilled migrants, bbc.com.* [13]

1.6 The contribution of migrant workers to host countries

Seven of the world’s ten richest economies by real gross domestic product (RGDP) per capita are in Asia and the Middle East, and all have sizeable populations of foreign migrant workers (FMWs) that have contributed greatly to growth. The proper handling of FMW involvement in an economy is crucial for continued prosperity.

Three key facts are relevant to FMWs’ contribution to the success of these economies. First, the phenomenon of relying on migrant workers is not new. At various times in history, fast-growing economies have relied on migrant workers to exploit the momentum of the economic opportunities that have come their way. Second, the high employment growth rates for the economies in question are a recent phenomenon, as the rates have been lower in the past. And third, migrant population proportions can drop sharply as illustrated by

Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates [14].

Table 2: Top 10 Economies by RGDP Per Capita and Migrants as Proportion of Population

Economy	Rank	Migrants as proportion of total population (2010)	Average Annual real GDP growth (2006-2010)
Qatar	1	74.2	16.6
Luxembourg	2	34.2	1.9
Macao, China	3	55.1	12.2
Singapore	4	38.7	6.6
Norway	5	9.9	0.8
Kuwait	6	76.6	2.6
Brunei	7	37.1	0.7
United Arab Emirates	8	43.8	3.2
United States	9	13.8	0.7
Hong Kong, China	10	38.8	4.0

Source: databank.worldbank.org [15]

1.7 Contribution of migrant workers to diversity

As workforce demographics shift and global markets emerge, workplace diversity inches closer to becoming a business necessity instead of a banner that companies wave to show their commitment to embracing differences and change. Employees reap tangible and intangible benefits from workplace benefits, not the least of which include respect from co-workers and business gains.

Mayhew (2015) states that a diverse workplace offers more than exposure to employees from different cultures and backgrounds [16]. Employees learn from co-workers whose work styles vary and whose attitudes about work varies from their own. This is particularly true for employees within multigenerational work environments. Traditional-generation workers learn new technology and processes from workers who belong to the tech-savvy millennial generation. Likewise, Generation X employees learn from exposure to the assertive,



go-getter work ethic typical of many Baby Boomers.

1.8 Complementing Singapore's resident workforce with foreign workers

Singapore needs to have calibrated levels of immigration and foreign manpower. The improving educational profile of Singaporeans will result in fewer workers who will take on lower-skilled jobs, which are nonetheless still necessary to support higher-skilled and better paying jobs.

These include lower-skilled jobs in the construction sector which are necessary to meet its infrastructural needs, as well as those in the eldercare and healthcare sector which will likely see an increase given its ageing population. There will thus be a continued need for foreign workers to support and complement its resident workforce, as well as to meet the social and healthcare needs of Singaporeans.

The Singapore government will elaborate more on the role played by foreign workers. It shall recognise that no single strategy will be sufficient to address our demographic challenges. All three strategies — supporting productivity improvements, encouraging greater resident labour force participation and a calibrated foreign manpower policy — must be used in combination to help offset the natural decline in our citizen workforce [17].

1.9 Acculturation: Thinking of Diversity and Cohesion with foreign employees

Acculturation is a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another group. Although acculturation is usually in the direction of a minority group adopting habits and language patterns of the dominant group, acculturation can be reciprocal—that is, the dominant group also adopts patterns typical of the minority group. Assimilation of one cultural group into another may be evidenced by changes in language preference, adoption of common attitudes and values, membership in common

social groups and institutions, and loss of separate political or ethnic identification.

Acculturation is the phenomenon that occurs “when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups.”[18] Recent research identified a bi-dimensional process of acculturation characterised by migrants or host society members showing varying levels of affinity towards their own culture, without being affected by their relationship with the new culture encountered [19].

1.10 The relevance of multiculturalism- Three perspectives

The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (2005) describes multiculturalism as the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest. It became a significant force in American society in the 1970s and 1980s as African-Americans, Latinos, and other ethnic groups explored their own history [20].

Three interrelated, but nevertheless distinctive, referents of multiculturalism and its related adjective multicultural which can be distinguished in public debate and discussion are: the demographic-descriptive, the ideological-normative and the programmatic-political.

1.9.1 The demographic-descriptive model

The “demographic-descriptive” usage occurs where multicultural is used to refer to the existence of ethnically or racially diverse segments in the population of a society or State. It represents a perception that such differences have some social significance—primarily because of perceived cultural differences though these are frequently associated with forms of structural differentiation. The precise ethnic groupings which exist in a State, the significance of ethnicity for social participation in societal



institutions and the processes through which ethnic differentiation is constructed and maintained may vary considerably between individual States, and over time [21].

1.9.2 The programmatic-political model

In the “programmatic-political” usage multiculturalism refers to specific types of programs and policy initiatives designed to respond to and manage ethnic diversity. According to Inglis (1995), it was in this usage that multiculturalism first gained currency after it was recommended in the 1965 Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. This Report recommended that multiculturalism replace the bicultural policy based on the British and French Charter groups around whom policies for ethnic diversity in Canadian society had been organised for over a century. Since then, its usage has extended rapidly to encompass the demographic-descriptive and the ideological-normative usage [22].

1.9.3 The ideological-normative model

The “ideological-normative” usage of multiculturalism is that which generates the greatest level of debate since it constitutes a slogan and model for political action based on sociological theorising and ethical-philosophical consideration about the place of those with culturally distinct identities in contemporary society [23]. Multiculturalism emphasises that acknowledging the existence of ethnic diversity and ensuring the rights of individuals to retain their culture should go hand in hand with enjoying full access to, participation in, and adherence to, constitutional principles and commonly shared values prevailing in the society. By acknowledging the rights of individuals and groups and ensuring their equitable access to society, advocates of multiculturalism also maintain that such a policy benefits both individuals and the larger society by reducing pressures for social conflict based on disadvantage and inequality. They also argue that multiculturalism is an enrichment for the

society as a whole. The close parallels between this ideological-normative usage of multiculturalism and the United Nations’ views on cultural diversity are clear.

1.11 The move to cosmopolitanism

Jagannath (2013) states that in today’s society there is a much needed urban cultural shift from just being a multicultural society to be able to adapt to a more cosmopolitan mind-set, particularly in western societies where people have greater access to both interact in a multicultural manner and therefore gain an opportunity towards being cosmopolitan [24].

Further, advances of globalisation have promoted a cosmopolitan view of the world, where travel, access to people of divergent cultures and diversity have largely risen throughout the world but a cosmopolitan society to some extent is a vision that has still not been attained or fulfilled in most societies [25].

1.12 Insight: France’s view of selective immigration

Below is provided an insight into the 2006 French government policy on immigration. The text has been adapted from the print edition of “The Economist”. It illustrates how France wants to deal with new immigration practices that were both accepted and contested by diverging views from local and foreign workers.

“If certain people don’t like France, they shouldn’t hesitate to leave.” With this echo of a notorious National Front slogan, Nicolas Sarkozy, the French interior minister, transformed the immigration bill that he put before parliament this week into an exercise in populism. But behind the rhetoric is a sensible change, towards a managed, high-skilled, demand-led immigration policy.

Until the mid-1970s, most immigrants to France came to work. Since the law was tightened in 1974, the inflows have changed.



Today, only 7,000 permanent workers arrive a year, down from over 170,000 in the late-1960s. Three-quarters of legal entrants to France are family-related: spouses, children and sometimes extended families of those already in the country. France has a low proportion of skilled immigrants.

Mr Sarkozy's bill aims to reverse this trend, by introducing selective immigration. There will be yearly targets for three categories of incomers: workers, students and families. Skilled migrants will be encouraged through a new three-year "talent" work permit. The bill includes measures to encourage foreign students. But it also requires newcomers to take lessons in the French language and civic education; it seeks to control family-related immigration, by clamping down on bogus marriages, and tightening up the rules to ensure that those bringing in a family have the means to pay for them; and it cracks down on illegal immigration by scrapping the automatic right to stay, granted after ten years in France illegally, and stepping up deportations.

Mr Sarkozy is unapologetic about linking France's social troubles, including last autumn's suburban riots, to immigration and the difficulty of integrating second-generation children. To accusations of mean-mindedness, he replies: "It is not a mark of generosity to create ghettos at the gates of our big towns, where there is only hopelessness and, beyond that, crime." He argues that, under the pretext of protecting jobs at home, France has created a system that lets in only those who have neither a job nor any useful skills.

In many ways, Mr Sarkozy is simply following the practice of other countries, notably Australia, Canada and Switzerland, as well as Britain and the Netherlands. In each case, the policy is based on a recognition that there is no such thing as zero immigration, and that a managed, skills-based immigration policy will not only control inflows but also bring benefits to host countries.

Source: The Economist (2006) *France and immigration: Let the skilled come.* [26]

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter covered a major aspect of workplace diversity by focusing on the foreign worker. Europe favoured multiculturalism by accepting the foreign worker who was, in turn, subject to acculturation where he decided either to abide by the rules and customs of the new country or to retain his culture while living in a supposedly secularised Europe-although religious values still predominate over many countries. It is a known fact that the foreign worker adds to diversity with regards to his skills. Rich countries are more favourable to having highly-educated and skilled workers than relying on the unskilled ones. If skilled workers go through the normal immigration route with possibilities of long-term residence, this might not be the case for the unskilled ones who, unfortunately, have recourse to illegal immigration and its impending consequences.

Rich countries are now tightening their barriers to entry thinking that problems linked with hiring foreign workers can be a threat to jobs in their economies affected by sluggish growth. On the other hand, there will still be the need to have foreign labour in emerging economies and rich nations where workplace demographics state that populations will get older and need to be replaced by foreign workers. Foreign employees at work breeds notions of hatred and racism and they might themselves suffer from social exclusion. This can exacerbate the problem of integration and create long-term irreparable damages at the community level.

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