



## **Integrating Internationally Trained Individuals without Reinventing the Wheel**

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## Integrating Internationally Trained Individuals without Reinventing the Wheel

Due to the retirement of the Baby Boom generation and decrease in birth rates, labour markets in many Western countries are currently facing an impending knowledge and skill shortage as the lack of available domestic talent rapidly shrinks. One of the obvious sources for skilled workers to fill that gap has been through immigration policy and the recruitment of Internationally Trained Individuals<sup>1</sup> (ITIs).

The hiring ITIs has not been as simple as many employers have expected. Many cite barriers to hiring these newcomers such as the inability to assess international training and education credentials, language proficiency and the ability for the individual to integrate into the culture of the company and the country.

As such governments and organizations have invested significant funds in the past decade resulting in millions of dollars being spent on thousands of projects to aid in the recruitment of ITIs. Many of these projects have sought to create new and innovative means of assessment and integration and many have been faced with an elimination of their funding due to the inability to produce results.

### Filling the Gap without Starting from Scratch

Especially during these difficult financial times and just as much so as we emerge from fiscal restraint, perspectives shift from what can we do to solve the problem that is new and innovative to what we can do using what we have today. One such approach that has been used by organizations for decades in the recruitment and integration of its new employees for decades has been Competency-based Talent Management or CBTM.

Many organizations throughout the world have effectively built their human resource functions around CBTM in order to operate more effectively and those who have not likely still incorporate CBTM in some capacity. CBTM is not only an effective method to organize talent but it is also associated with a critical collection of tools that can be used in bridging the skills gap for ITIs; an approach which may cost little or nothing for some organizations and is effective for all current and potential employees.

### What is CBTM?

CBTM is a HR management approach that standardizes and integrates all HR activities based on *competencies* that support organizational goals. Competencies are:

*Observable abilities, skills, knowledge, motivations or traits defined in terms of the behaviours needed for successful job performance.*

<sup>1</sup> Internationally trained individuals have been given various titles in business literature such as Internationally Educated Professionals and Foreign Trained Workers. Each reflects newcomers to a country who have received most of their education or training internationally; typically from non-Western countries.



A CBTM system can be used as the backbone for every HR function to ensure effective outcomes are achieved for the employer, employee and customer as the competencies are the hub which binds all processes together.

In essence, competencies ensure that every function speaks using the same language.

CBTM covers HR functions spanning selection and hiring, designing work and process structures, compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management and succession planning. Each is connected through the standardized competencies. For example, gaps identified on a performance assessment can be fed into learning plan to bridge the gaps which can be addressed through competency-based training programs.

**Why CBTM for ITIs?**

The key to understanding how CBTM can be leveraged for use with ITIs is to dig a bit deeper into what competencies are. Beyond the definition above, competencies reflect detailed information about your organization. Competencies:

- describe which ‘soft skills’ or behaviours are required in jobs in your organization and how they are used;
- indicate the level of language proficiency used on the job, in which contexts, how frequently and with whom;
- provide detailed information on the culture of your organization and your country.

To illustrate how competencies contain this key information to current and potential employee’s let us look at a sample competency from HRSG’s competency dictionary, *Adaptability*. Featured are behavioural indicators for proficiency level 3.

Competency	What does this say for ITIs?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapts to new ideas and initiatives across a wide variety of issues or situations.</li> </ul>	<i>Flexibility in this organization will require adaptation on my part, not only on others.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports and adapts to major changes that challenge traditional ways of operating.</li> </ul>	<i>I will need to learn about the new types of operating in this business culture in order to support change initiatives.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapts interpersonal style to highly diverse individuals and groups in a range of situations.</li> </ul>	<i>I will need to communicate with many different people from unique backgrounds using different styles.</i>

If you already use competencies in your organization a quick review of your competency dictionary using this different point of view – that of the ITI – may lead to a new perspective on new ways to use these competencies. If you have not yet implemented CBTM in your organization this could be one more reason to support your initiative.

Competencies are only the starting point as, in organizations using CBTM, the competencies are connected to each of the Human Resources functions. Thus, your competency approach can support ITIs in many different ways. The chart below illustrates some of the ways that CBTM can help you bridge your gaps with ITIs in your organization

**Case and Point: HRSG’s Competency Based Selection Interviewing Workshop**

Based on the principles of Competency-based Management, HRSG has developed and delivered a workshop on Competency-based selection interviewing for over 15 years. The workshop teaches HR and line managers how to leverage competencies in the recruitment process. The core learning objectives are the course are how competencies can be used to ensure a hiring process remains non-discriminatory and that all candidates have fair and equal access to jobs. The key formula that assists the equitable hiring process are competencies which assess bona fide occupational job requirements such as the soft skills, language and culture often cited by employers as critical to assess with ITIs.

This workshop has been delivered throughout North America but also internationally in countries such as Egypt, Qatar and South Africa. The successful delivery of the course and implementation of the processes by candidates demonstrates the international applicability of competencies in their ability to recruit and assess candidates regardless of their country of origin.

Function	Implications for ITIs
<b>Description of Work and Processes</b>	A competency-based job description provides a clear indication of the competencies (and thus culture, language and behaviours) required on the job for potential job candidates and for employees once they are on the job.
<b>Selection and Hiring</b>	The candidate’s resume can easily be compared to a competency-based job description in the screening stage. Also competency-based interviews typically use behavioural-based questions which require the candidate to provide clear examples of how they have demonstrated the behaviours in the competencies required for the job. Both processes can help you assess the ITIs international education and training qualifications without using costly credential recognition services that can not be used for recognition of on-the-job training.
<b>Compensation and Benefits</b>	Again, the assessment of international credentials (e.g., post-secondary education, certifications) can be used to determine equivalencies for your organization. Formal credentials are often used in determining rates of pay.
<b>Performance Feedback and Management</b>	Competency-based performance assessments and self assessments help determine the gaps that will need to be addressed in the employee. Though the employee may think they have <i>Adaptability</i> if their interpretation of the competency differs from yours it will be apparent in a quick assessment.
<b>Training and Development</b>	Once the employee has been assessed, and their gaps identified, learning opportunities connected with those specific gaps can be provided to the employee. By having competency-based training and development, these programs will teach the learner specifically what the competency means in your organization. This will also result in cost savings by ensuring organizations make better decisions regards what training to offer employees.
<b>Career Development &amp; Succession Management</b>	Learning plans and performance assessment results can be connected to career development and succession management plans. This helps aid in retention so that your employee is assured they have a path to follow in your organization and succession management to ensure that gaps are filled before they become a liability

**Looking Back, Looking Forward**

Revisiting your competency initiative may be just what your organization needs for an effective means to recruit and integrate Internationally Trained Individuals in your workplace. Not only does a competency based approach allow you to use existing tools for a new population, continuing with your initiative benefits all current and future employees due to their universal applicability.

If your organization has yet to start your initiative, diving in slowly can still be effective if funding is short. Start with purchasing and customizing a competency dictionary and creating competency-based interview questions. IT can be an affordable way to start your initiative. When more funding is available bring other components online such as performance management. Ideally, restructuring your human resources operations through a competency-based approach is the most efficient means of starting an initiative. Conservative financial times call for conservative approaches however, and such starting small will help you go big in the future.

### About the Author



**Shaun Vollick** is a consultant with Human Resource Systems Group and operates out of Toronto, Canada. Shaun has delivered a number of competency-based projects to support individuals of diverse backgrounds including the integration of Internationally Trained Individuals throughout Canada. His current area of research is on historically disadvantaged individuals and their access to learning and development within the workplace.

### About HRSG

Human Resource Systems Group, Ltd is an international leader in developing, implementing and supporting competency-based management solutions worldwide. HRSG offers integrated solutions including professional services, training and its flagship software product i-SkillSuite® which all support competency-based initiatives.

For more information about HRSG products and services, visit [www.hrsg.ca](http://www.hrsg.ca).

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