Beyond Borders: How the ‘Canadian Experience’ Ban Could Transform National Hiring Culture



When Ontario announced that employers can no longer ask for “Canadian experience” in job postings or interviews, it marked more than just a policy change. It signaled a shift in what it means to belong in the Canadian workplace. For years, countless skilled immigrants have been told—sometimes kindly, sometimes bluntly—that their foreign experience “doesn’t count here.” Now, the province is calling that out for what it is: systemic discrimination masquerading as due diligence.

But make no mistake—this change will ripple far beyond Ontario. It challenges every HR manager in Canada to rethink how they define merit, assess competence, and build workplace inclusion in a labour market that depends on newcomers more than ever before.

The Numbers Tell a Story

According to Statistics Canada, immigrants now make up more than **one in four workers** in the country. In major urban centres like Toronto and Vancouver, that number is closer to **50 percent**. Yet research from the **Conference Board of Canada** shows that nearly half of all immigrants are underemployed relative to their education and experience. Skilled engineers end up driving taxis. Experienced nurses take entry-level care aide jobs. Project managers with a decade of leadership experience abroad are hired as junior coordinators.

The reason, time and again, is “Canadian experience.” Employers say they want proof that a candidate understands local norms, business culture, or compliance expectations. But in practice, it often becomes a proxy for something else—comfort, familiarity, and implicit bias.

What Ontario’s Law Actually Does

The new regulation, part of Ontario’s **Working for Workers Five Act**, amends the **Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act, 2006** and associated employment standards. It explicitly prohibits employers from requiring Canadian experience in job ads or interviews, except where mandated by law or professional licensing.

That means an employer can no longer post, “Canadian experience required,” nor can they ask during interviews, “Do you have experience working in Canada?” Instead, they must focus on whether a candidate’s skills, credentials, and experience—wherever obtained—demonstrate the ability to perform the job.

For many HR departments, this might seem like an administrative tweak. In reality, it’s a deep cultural correction. It compels organizations to examine long-held assumptions about what counts as “qualified.”

The Real Issue: Comfort Over Competence

A 2022 Ryerson University study on hiring bias found that employers reviewing identical resumes were **40 percent more likely** to invite a candidate with an Anglo-sounding name to interview than one with a foreign name. Even when educational and professional credentials were the same, employers frequently cited “fit” or “familiarity” as deciding factors.

“Canadian experience” has often served as a socially acceptable version of that same bias. It reflects a subconscious preference for people who look, speak, or act like those already inside the organization. The result is a cycle that quietly excludes qualified newcomers while reinforcing homogeneity at the top.

Why HR Managers Should Care

Beyond ethics, there’s a hard business case here. Canada’s **labour shortage** remains one of the country’s top economic concerns. The **Business Council of Canada** reported in 2024 that **over 60 percent of employers** could not fill key positions because they could not find applicants with the right skills. Meanwhile, Canada welcomes **more than 400,000 new immigrants every year**, most of whom have post-secondary education and years of experience.

This disconnect isn’t a talent shortage. It’s a recognition gap. HR managers who fail to adapt will lose access to the fastest-growing, most diverse segment of the workforce.

But those who take this moment seriously can turn compliance into competitive advantage.

Building a New Definition of Experience

Forward-thinking employers are already leading the way. A Toronto-based construction firm recently replaced “Canadian experience” with a structured **skills equivalency matrix** that evaluates past projects, safety records, and technical credentials from abroad. Within a year, their hiring pool expanded by 35 percent, and they filled 12 long-vacant supervisor roles.

Similarly, a major hospital network in Ottawa partnered with immigrant-serving agencies to create mentorship placements for internationally educated nurses. The result was a **60 percent retention rate** after six months, compared to less than 30 percent among traditional recruits.

The lesson is clear: when you invest in recognizing global talent, you don’t lower standards—you strengthen them.

The Cultural Shift Ahead

Ontario’s law is likely the beginning of a national movement. Human rights

commissions in **British Columbia, Québec, and the federal sector** have already signaled interest in reviewing similar restrictions.

For HR professionals across Canada, now is the time to prepare. Audit job descriptions, train hiring managers, and build interview rubrics that focus on competencies rather than location of experience. Ask: does this criterion actually predict job success, or does it simply make us more comfortable?

It’s also an opportunity to revisit what “fit” really means. Many organizations say they hire for culture fit but increasingly realize they should hire for **culture add**—people who bring fresh perspectives and new problem-solving approaches that expand the organization’s capacity to adapt and innovate.

Looking Forward

The end of “Canadian experience” is about more than job ads. It’s about dismantling the invisible walls that keep talented people on the sidelines. It challenges HR leaders to be courageous enough to trust their own systems—to define skill through evidence, not origin.

If the past few years have taught us anything, it’s that diversity isn’t a checkbox; it’s a strength. This new rule is a reminder that experience has no borders. And for HR managers willing to lead this shift, the rewards—innovation, loyalty, and reputation—will speak for themselves.