

## **Learning from Success: Indo-Canadians and the Facilitators of Economic Integration**

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### **Abstract**

This paper details the findings that emerged from roundtable discussions during a unique two-day conference focused on the economic integration of Indian immigrants in Canada. The participants of the conference comprised primarily individuals who had immigrated to Canada from India and who had successfully established themselves in Canada. The conference was the first of its kind to bring together academics, practitioners, entrepreneurs and other professional Indo-Canadians to deliberate on issues pertaining to the successful economic integration of Indians in Canada. The key messages that emerged from their deliberations highlight the individual and structural factors that facilitate economic integration and the need for solidarity and advocacy among Indo-Canadians to fight systemic barriers and to create systems of support for the community.

Keywords: Immigrants, Indo-Canadians, Diaspora, Economic Integration, Canada

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## **Introduction**

Despite numerous challenges, many immigrants from India have successfully integrated into the Canadian society and economy. However, very little is known about these successes, or about factors that might have facilitated the same. This paper presents a thematic analysis of roundtable discussions held during a unique two-day conference, focused on the economic integration of Indian immigrants in Canada. The participants for the conference comprised primarily individuals who had immigrated to Canada from India and who had established themselves successfully in Canadian society. The conference was the first of its kind to bring together academics, practitioners, entrepreneurs and other professional Indo-Canadians to deliberate on issues pertaining to the successful economic integration of Indians in Canada. The key points that emerged from their deliberations highlight the individual and structural factors that facilitate economic integration and the need for solidarity and advocacy among Indo-Canadians to fight against systemic barriers and to create systems of support for the community.

This paper is divided into five sections. A review of the literature follows this introduction, followed by a brief overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the paper. The third section is the methodology and the fourth section discusses the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of the key insights that emerge from the paper.

## **Review of Literature**

Indians have been immigrating to Canada for over a century; however, it is only in recent years that Indian immigrants have formed a significant proportion of the immigrant population. For the past decade, India has been one of the top three source countries of immigration to Canada. In 2010, India was the top source country and contributed over 9% of the total immigrant population to enter the country (CIC, 2010). The 2006 census reported that Indians formed the second largest immigrant population in the country, with over 443,690 persons of Indian origin living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009). More recent estimates from the voluntary National Household Survey indicate that there were approximately 547,890 Indian immigrants in Canada in 2011 (Canadian Immigrant, 2014).

Over the years, there has also been a shift in the composition of Indian immigrants to Canada, due to the increase in the number of skilled immigrant class migrants and a decrease in levels of family class immigration. Apart from those immigrating as permanent residents, many Indians enter the country each year through temporary resident permits as students or temporary workers. In 2009, 5,726 Indians entered Canada as students, while in 2010, that number more than doubled, to 11,543. This was largely due to the Student Partners Program launched in 2009 between Canada's visa offices in India and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), which increased the approval rate for study permit applications at participating Canadian colleges. The corresponding figures for temporary foreign workers from India went up from 6,411 in 2009 to 7,972 in 2012 (CIC, 2011). Recent changes to the federal immigration policy, which give preference to prearranged employment (CIC, 2011) or advantage to international students in applying for permanent residence status, make it likely that these temporary residents would eventually opt to become permanent residents.

Indian immigrants face hurdles to their economic integration that are common to a majority of newcomers to Canada. The 2006 Census revealed that Indian immigrants had higher unemployment rates compared to Canadians in general, with even higher rates for Indian immigrant women (Agrawal and Lovell, 2010). However recent research has found that even second generation South Asians are disadvantaged in their labor market outcomes (George and Chaze, 2014). The proportion of Indian-born low earners was also found to be higher than the Canadian-born (Agrawal and Lovell, 2010). Possible reasons for this are lack of effective and vast professional networks within the Indian community and/or discrimination against visible minority persons.

As a visible minority group, Indian immigrants face a number of challenges and barriers in their settlement and integration in Canada, despite Canada's claims to be an egalitarian society based on values of justice and equality. The early years of Indian immigration to Canada were fraught with incidents of racism and discrimination (Ralston, 1999).

In the 2002 Ethnic and Diversity survey, 20% of all visible minority persons reported having experienced discrimination related to their ethnicity, race, language, religion and accent in the previous five years (Statistics Canada, 2003). This discrimination had an impact on the settlement and integration of immigrants in many areas of life such as access to suitable housing (Farrell 2005), earning an adequate income (Farrell, 2005) or feeling of membership to society. Discrimination is also known to have an adverse effect on the health and wellbeing of persons (Pavalko, Mossakowski, & Hamilton, 2003; George et al, 2012).

Less is known about the success of Indian immigrants in the economic sphere. Agrawal and Lovell's (2010) study of high-income Indian immigrants found major disparities in income within the Indo-Canadian population. High income Indian immigrants, according to this study, were associated with immigration at a younger age (between 25-44 years), were professional males and were proficient in one of the country's two official languages upon entry into Canada.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Studies about settlement and integration often use terms such as integration, adaptation and acculturation interchangeably (Remennick, 2003). Remennick focuses on the definitions of assimilation, integration and acculturation, arguing that 'integration' involves an immigrant retaining his/her core identity while gradually becoming politically, economically and socio-culturally engaged with the host society. According to Remennick, integration differs from assimilation in that it 'adds' rather than 'replaces.' It involves socio-economic adjustment and instrumental adaptation to the demands of the host society. Integration can be understood as holistic or differential, where the latter refers to the selective adoption of host society characteristics (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly & Haller, 2005). Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2002) defines integration as a two-way process that encourages adjustment by both newcomers and the host society. Despite official policy, integration is often treated as a one-way process, with the host society expecting immigrants to adapt (IOM, 2006; Li, 2003). Other researchers have conceptualized integration as a process as well as an outcome (Bretton, 1992 cited in Valtonen, 1996; Berry, 2001) and as an ethnic group phenomenon (Berry, 2001) involving changes in attitudes as well as behaviors.

This paper understands immigrant integration as a multidimensional process consisting of four components— economic, social, cultural and political (CCR, 1998). Both individual and structural factors appear to affect integration. Individual factors that appear to impact integration include education, knowledge of the language of the receiving society and work experience in the host country (Delander et al., 2005); age and the presence of a spouse and children (Guest & Stamm, 1993); race and religion (Reitz et al. 2009); experiences of violence (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002); and caring/provisioning work (VanderPlaats, 2007). Other researchers have identified structural factors, such as opportunity, structure and access, as important to integration (Lerner and Menahem, 2003). Other influencing factors may include ethno-cultural affinity; liberal immigration policy welfare and service provisions; humanitarian features of the social services offered by voluntary and religious organizations; an emphasis by the host society on accommodation and adaptation (Valtonen, 1996); institutional completeness of the ethnic communities (Breton, 1964); experiences of racism (Jiwani, 2005); and social capital (Eraydin, Tasan-Kok & Vranken, 2009).

Economic integration can be viewed as the extent to which the immigrant participates in the economic life of the host country. Indicators for economic integration include employment status, duration of unemployment, career advancement, earnings, credential recognition, employment/entry into the field of prior employment; employment; social security and level of education (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003). Immigrant integration may also be affected by societal level indicators, such as the attitudes of those in recipient countries; reported cases of discrimination; perceptions of immigrants by the host society; incidence and effects of diversity policies; access to immigrant/refugee services; and appropriate representation in mass media (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003).

For the most part, the literature on immigrant integration in Canada focuses on problems in integration and on finding solutions to the same. Schechter (2010) suggests that while problem-based learning has its strengths, and can be a “productive trigger for inquiry, reflection and change” (p. 148), there is also merit in learning from success. Success-based learning can “reveal the hidden knowledge that contributed to successful practices.” (p. 148). Success-based learning focuses on tacit knowledge that contributes to success. This paper approaches the issue of economic integration with a lens of success-based learning.

## **Method**

The data for this paper emerges from participant discussions over two days of a conference organized by the first author of this paper in collaboration with the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), in Toronto in October 2013. The aim of the conference was to examine and document the dimensions of economic integration—labor market integration; entrepreneurship and innovation; and economic transnationalism—for the Indian immigrant community in Canada; and to create opportunities to bring together academic and practical knowledge related to the economic integration of Indian immigrants. It was also an objective of the conference to facilitate networks between Indo-Canadians and persons working with this ethnic group as a basis for future collaborative work. Canadians of Indian origin who had the potential to contribute, based on their own successful settlement in Canada, were invited to participate in the conference. Potential participants for the conference were recruited through professional networks of the collaborators, through letters sent to the members of a large Indo-Canadian professional organization and through invitations using LinkedIn. The recruitment strategy ensured that, for the most part, the participants were established in the Canadian labor market with varying degrees of success. The invited participants were both men and women, most of whom had lived in Canada for over 10 years. They comprised academics, businessmen, professionals, graduate students and representatives of non-profit organizations serving Indian immigrants. Most of the participants were between 30-50 years of age.

Over the two days of the conference, the panel discussions were interspersed with three roundtable discussion sessions, in which all those present were invited to discuss key personal and environmental factors they felt affected immigrant integration. Approximately 40 persons participated in these roundtable discussions over two days. To keep the discussion as natural as possible, each discussion group was given a recording device and the participants in that group controlled the recording of the discussion, without the presence of the organizers of the conference. This allowed for a more free discussion among group participants and for anonymity to be maintained in relation to the findings that emerged from each group. The recordings were transcribed verbatim by a research assistant, who was familiar with the conference. The transcriptions were then analyzed for emerging themes following the tenets of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 1998). In keeping with the prescriptions of unobtrusive methods of research, the transcription of the recorded conversations was treated as "texts" that served as a starting point for the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Such a method removes the emphasis from the point of origin of the individuals contributing to the creation of the data, to focus on the data itself as created and shared within the group discussion. The authors of this paper used thematic analysis to identify a range of experiences in relation to economic integration, and to increase depth of understanding, so as to generate theoretically richer observations (Rubin and Babbie, 2001).

### **Findings: Facilitators of Economic Integration**

Three factors were seen as facilitating economic integration. These included personal factors, factors related to the self in relation to others and external factors.

#### **Personal Factors**

Personal factors that were seen as crucial for positive economic integration included a positive attitude, upgrading education, the age of the immigrant, tailoring expectations based on reliable information and soft skills training.

#### **Positive attitude**

Participants felt that having a positive attitude was key to their own successful integration. Included in this broad umbrella term were traits such as patience, perseverance, faith in self and in a higher power, determination/will power, taking responsibility for oneself and never giving up on oneself. In the words of one of the participants, *"If you ever give up on yourself it's done [over]."* Another participant's narrative combines many of these ideas:

*"I think you should be positive and motivated whatever you want to do... and you cannot always blame government... you have to be self-dependent and you have to do by yourself government not going to help each and every individual's right. So I think for my perspective everybody should be self-dependent for their own achievement or anything, whatever his or her goal is. I believe in Karma, whatever you're going to do, just do it yourself, take initiative whatever you want to do and no one can limit you for anything."*

The participants stressed the importance of willingness to change, adaptability and flexibility in the integration process. One of the participants felt that, though negative thoughts were a natural outcome of the difficulties immigrants have while looking for work, it was necessary to put aside negativity and focus on what the immigrant could offer the potential employers. Understanding what the job required and adapting oneself to fit the requirements, being willing to do work that was far below the skill level of the individual and relocating outside of bigger economic hubs were some ways in which the participants had displayed their flexibility and adaptability in looking for employment. Conversely, not seeing the big picture, or not having patience or expecting direct benefits from each activity was seen as a barrier to economic integration. One participant perceived that these constituted a negative attitude that could be detrimental in economic integration.

### **Willingness to upgrade education**

Participants felt that upgrading one's education in Canada was necessary to be more relevant to the Canadian job market and for integration into Canadian society.

*"I did most of my degrees in India, but again I feel the need to study a little bit more so that I bridge the gap, the knowledge gap, I feel especially for humanities and social sciences the way the subjects and the course materials are entirely different so I need to bridge that gap to be able to move further in my life."*

Another participant echoed this need for upgrading one's Indian education with a Canadian qualification. This participant perceived that going in for a bridging program after immigrating gave the participant an edge over other immigrants who might not have gone in for a similar "upgrading" of qualifications.

### **Age of the immigrant**

Age was seen as a factor that could both facilitate or pose a barrier to integration. Coming at a younger age and as a student was seen as being a facilitator, as one had opportunities to learn to present oneself in ways that were acceptable. Immigrating at a stage of life where one was responsible for a family was seen as posing many more problems in the immigrant's economic integration: *"If you are not a student and you're coming directly as a breadwinner and you don't know anybody, it takes that much more effort and that much more time to actually get into the system."*

An older age was also seen as a definite barrier in getting jobs. *"I think from my personal experience, yes there is problem for older immigrants to get the jobs. I can talk about the accounting profession, yes older people it's tough for them to get the jobs as compared to the younger ones; there is discrimination."*

### **Tailoring expectations based on reliable information**

Having realistic expectations about Canada and what to expect in terms of labor market outcomes was seen as important for the newcomer to the country. A few of the participants felt that if immigrants to the country did their research well, prior to arriving in the country, they would not be misled by persons/advertisements that proposed Canada as a "dreamland" or "the land of milk and honey." Such research and preparation was seen as important, as it could help avoid severe disappointments or the shock of having to deal not only with the lack of employment opportunities but also other stressors, such as racialization.

*"Many of us who come from big cities have access to internet and accessing this information is fairly easy, but we interviewed people who came from smaller cities like Patna and smaller suburbs; kind of places where they didn't have that kind of information to access."*

The Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP) has been operational since 2010, providing pre-departure orientation to economic immigrants in their home countries, prior to their immigration. According to the Government of Canada website, the program "helps immigrants better prepare for economic success by providing information, planning, and online support through partners in Canada" (Government of Canada, 2013). One of the conference participants describes her experience with this program.



*"Before coming, we attended a program which was called CIIP - Canadian immigration Integration Program. I did a workshop for two whole days with my husband and I thought, you know what, that is going to help me really well; but after coming here I just realized that it did nothing to help me. There was information, but not the right one and not the one I could have used sitting back home, you know."*

This participant felt that had she received the information that was meaningful for her (for example information about procuring multiple copies of her university transcripts prior to immigrating) it would have been tremendously helpful to her in her economic integration in Canada.

### **Soft skills training**

Soft skills are defined as "the personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people" (Oxford dictionary, 2014). A few of the participants conflated soft skills with language and accent and stressed the importance of being able to articulate oneself in a manner that was understandable to others in the workplace. A few others felt that accent was not an important consideration in a diverse city such as Toronto. What they felt was more important was the manner in which one presented oneself and one's ideas, understanding whether certain topics were appropriate in professional communication and being effective in communicating the same.

*"I think what matters more is, like you said, how you, how you project yourself, how you present yourself, what to say and what not to say, which is very important, very important. So, it tells a lot about you as a person."*

Soft skills were seen as very important in Canada, irrespective of the industry or type of work one was engaged in. Immigrants who had been made conscious of soft skills and were trained in the same were seen as having an edge over others in looking for employment. One of the participants, who was often contacted by newcomers for guidance, felt there was a sharp distinction between the professional demeanor of immigrants who had gone through such training compared to those who had not:

*"There is, based on my anecdotal experience, clear difference between those who came through the bridging program. They presented themselves very well, they called and made an appointment, they were professional and they asked the questions; and it was half an hour and they would leave. Those who did not come through the bridging program, they were like as if they were in India or somewhere else; you know, going into places and things about me which I really do not want to go, like how many kids I have and what does my wife does..."*

### **Self in relation to others**

Some qualities for success involved the individual in connection with their environment. These factors included navigating the labor market and positioning oneself, and establishing professional connections through networking, mentorship, and volunteering.

### **Navigating the labor market and positioning oneself**

The participants spoke of the importance of strategizing a job search, of being aware of what was required by the employer and positioning one's skills accordingly.

*"I think that the key difference between something as basic as getting hired and not getting hired is your ability to project yourself, because I don't think any potential employer has a preconceived bias because a lot of the way you look, but a lot of it is because of the way you present yourself... The hiring here [in Canada] is about [based on] how can you help the company."*

A few participants felt that the ability to position oneself and sell oneself was again dependent upon the opportunity to be able to reach the potential employer in the first place, and on the receptivity of the potential employer. There was also a recognition that the immigrants need to understand the limitations posed upon them by longstanding employment practices, such as referral-based hiring, and navigate their way around the same.

**Establishing professional connections: Networking, mentorship and volunteerin****Networking**

Many of the participants stressed the importance of networking for finding work in Canada. The participants spoke of how they had gone about building these networks from scratch, overcoming personal and other barriers in doing so. A participant stressed that getting a job was often about networking and being at the right place at the right time. However, this participant felt that there were other issues involved, apart from the sheer willingness to build networks.

*"How do I build a network? I have to go out and work and people I interact with....I don't have a (social life) I don't have one, I can't afford one... so to go and attend an event in the evening, I need to have a car; I don't drive a car and I can't pay insurance for a car; these are basic premises you need to kind of question all the time."*

**Mentorship**

Mentorship was mentioned as a facilitating factor, related to building and enhancing networks. Mentoring relationships were seen as being beneficial to both the mentee and the mentor. One of the participants shared that immigrants need to overcome their inhibitions and approach people in the networks they are building and ask them to be mentors. Mentors were seen as benefiting from the relationship, as they had an opportunity to give back to their community as well as enhance their own professional profile. As one participant put it: *"It is a resume builder in its own right."*

When the mentee was more professionally accomplished than the mentor, the relationship was perceived as not very beneficial to the mentee. One participant shared a story of a mentor asking his mentee to look out for a job for the mentor, while looking for a job for himself. Another participant felt that when settlement service agencies offered to match the immigrant with a mentor who was not likely to be of much use to the mentee, the immigrant had the right to refuse that individual and wait until a more suitable match came along. This participant did not see the mentor having a lower qualification than the mentee to be a drawback, as that in itself had little to do with what the mentor could offer the mentee. As the participant explained:

*"In my opinion... the job of the mentor is to tell you what to expect, how you are getting ready, what are you preparing for, and the rest is all on the mentee."*

One participant, who worked as a faculty member in an educational institution, shared his frustration at not being able to really help the immigrants who approached him for mentorship in a manner that was meaningful to them, due to the systemic barriers in the academy. He felt ethically torn in his role as a mentor between wanting to encourage these mentees to keep trying for tenure track positions within academia, and the reality that most would end up with contractual sessional teaching jobs

*"I want to support somebody like you and many others who are in touch with me, but in my heart I know that it's next to impossible to get into academia, because first of all there are no jobs, very few jobs especially in the social sciences maybe in some large departments there may be but, so, so what is the role of the mentor? You know it's kind of an ethical issue for me, you know, should I keep telling them, no do this do that and try, and I know that what they do is they end up teaching course by course."*

### **Volunteering**

The phenomenon of immigrants volunteering is a highly contested one in Canada. Immigrants are encouraged to volunteer by government agencies and nonprofit organizations, in order to gain Canadian work experience (Volunteer Canada, 2012). Research has shown that for most immigrants, volunteering involves costs of time and scarce financial resources that they do not have (George & Chaze, 2009). Yet, volunteerism can help immigrants to gain familiarity with the work environment and to increase their networks (George & Chaze, 2009; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000). Volunteering has also been seen as an inherently exploitative relationship in which the Canadian enterprises benefit from a free, highly-educated workforce (Slade, 2008).

The experiences of the participants of the roundtable discussions highlighted some of these contradictions. Volunteering was seen as crucial for being noticed by future employers and in order to gain knowledge of their field in Canada. However, participants recognized the difficult choices this posed to immigrants, whereby the immigrant had to choose between volunteering and taking up any paid work they could, to meet the economic needs of the family. One participant spoke about the financial and time costs associated with volunteer work.

*"One hour [of] volunteering [work] requires four hours of coming from going up and coming back [commuting] and if you have kids [the immigrant] volunteer requires daycare of the kids. So it's like those things are there, they are there they are practical ground realities."*

### **External factors**

The participants identified some factors, external to the individual, that had the potential to greatly impact the individual immigrants' economic integration. These factors included hiring practices and employment equity, as well as the need to educate and build alliances/solidarity/networks within the Indian community for institutional completeness and for combating systemic barriers.

### **Hiring practices and employment equity**

The participants identified some factors external to the individual or their immediate connections that had the potential to greatly influence the success of the individual immigrant. These included: policies in relation to employment equity, need for a brand image, hiring practices in Canada and the need for advocacy.

A few of the participants spoke of prevalent hiring practices where not merit, but being known to the hiring manager, was instrumental in securing the job. There was a perception that lack of regulation or control on these kinds of practices became very problematic to immigrants who might not have the advantage of such pre-existing relationships and networks. Discriminatory hiring practices, such as the requirement for Canadian experience, were seen as a barrier, as were the requirements for Canadian references. *"People struggle here for references; along with Canadian experience they ask for Canadian references."*

*"Yes, individual factors, all these what you are listing now are always important, but what is equally important is the recognition of systemic factors, because the earlier we realize and tell people that it's not due to your lack of work that you are not getting a job but it is due to systemic factors: labor market discrimination, that people will not get depressed, people will not lose confidence in themselves."*

Participants felt that recognizing the role of structural factors and educating immigrants about the same was very important to maintain the confidence and mental health of newcomers, who often feel depressed in the face of having failed for no apparent reason. Much discussion centered on discriminatory hiring practices in Canada and the need to be aware of the same and navigate the same. Research with immigrants has highlighted the role of structural barriers in integration (Lerner & Menahem, 2003; Jiwani, 2005).

Participants opined that strategies such as having a positive outlook or networking could only take the immigrant so far in the face of structural issues, such as biased hiring practices and discrimination.

*"The other thing; there are a lot of people who come from out, immigrated, they talk about being called positive but don't take me wrong, all of us need to be, but it doesn't help, it's just absurd, what are you being positive about?... the question is...are you honest enough to go [ask] what are the structural issues that are facing us.... it's not just individual positivity, it's what are those things that I'm banging my head against the wall with and then how to organize to try to fix those as well."*

The Employment Equity Act, 1995 applies to all federally-funded organizations in Canada and identifies four groups of people - women, visible minorities, Aboriginals and persons with disabilities - as requiring "special measures and accommodation of differences" (Ministry of Justice, 2012, 6) to achieve equality in the workplace. A few participants in this study who worked in academic institutions that received federal funding felt that the provision of employment equity helped level the playing field for disadvantaged groups. One of the participants felt that it had worked in favor of more women and visible minority persons being hired across departments. A participant explained the ways in which the act dictated the hiring practices in the departments of the university, by standardizing the hiring process as well as providing an edge to the employment equity candidate in the final selection between two equally qualified participants.

*"When we hire, we have a matrix, and the matrix is drawn directly from the job ad, we also have, employment equity is on our job ad and it's invoked. We have the same questions for every candidate, we have the same routine for every candidate, we're not allowed to deviate from the script and we have to go through..."*

Employment equity was seen as a buffer that prevented hiring on the basis of subjective and potentially discriminatory criteria, such as the candidate's soft skills.

### **Need to educate and build alliances/solidarity/supportive network**

Participants spoke of the need to build alliances/solidarity/supportive network within the Indian community, for institutional completeness and to combat systemic barriers. However, the fragmentation within the Indian community was seen as a barrier to such solidarity.

*"There is racism as society as a whole but then there is racism within, within our society, within our community. So I think I am more concerned about the racism that is within our [community] because it fragments us ... because divided you fall..."*

Building a network of Indo-Canadians was seen as important in providing such support, mentorship and validation to the community members. However, there was fear that participating in such networks could be seen as a sign that one was not trying to integrate into Canadian society.

Advocacy was seen as crucial for bringing about long-term systemic change. Structural barriers were seen as being a barrier not only to the first generation but also to the children of immigrants, whom research had shown are facing similar barriers; and the participants perceived that Indian immigrants needed to collectively advocate for systemic change.

One participant felt that political action is very important. "Everybody seems to agree that we need political action; being politically active is very important." Another barrier to building such solidarity was the lack of awareness about systemic barriers or knowledge of political organizing. The tension between recognizing the importance of political action and the discomfort with building a network of Indo-Canadians to take such action can be seen in the interaction between a few members around one table:

*"I think that the self knowledge of who you are, that is very, very important but so is political ability, political voice, political participation. What I am a little bit nervous about is how do you do that as an individual; it's very hard to do that (comment by another participant: Yeah, it has to be with others) So, how do you do it with others, and then do you start to sort of, kind of gloss over some of those individual differences because you need a big unified voice, then why don't you just become straight Canadian? Integrate with Canada?" (Comment by another participant: "Well because they push you out, that's why, you can't integrate with them because they push you.")*

Some participants referred to the importance of building what they called “the Indian Brand” within the Canadian mindset. Showcasing the strengths of the Indian community would benefit all its members as they would be looked upon more favorably in the eyes of the potential employers. One of the participants perceived that the Indian community in the United States had created such a brand presence and that had the potential to impact how people viewed all Indians in the States. Indo-Canadians lacked such a brand image and consequently the positive benefits that one could derive from the same.

In summary, data from the group discussion revealed three types of factors that impact Indo-Canadians’ economic integration. Personal factors included age and steps that the individual had to take to work on themselves such as developing a positive attitude, tailoring expectations, upgrading education or developing soft skills. A second set of factors relate to the individual immigrant and their interactions with the labor market, and include positioning oneself in relation to the labor market and increasing professional networks. A third set of factors relate to the larger context within which the immigrant looks for work. This includes hiring practices and policies regarding employment equity. It also includes factors that currently may not exist, but that have the potential to make a difference to immigrant employment, such as building alliances for advocacy to fight systemic barriers to immigrant employment and creating a brand image for Indian immigrants.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The participants at the roundtable discussion were, for the most part, examples of success stories of Indo-Canadian immigrant integration. The majority either held mid- to senior-level positions in the field of education or in the non-profit sector, or were entrepreneurs. Apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Agrawal & Lovell, 2010), immigrants of this particular demographic profile are rarely the focus of research with immigrants in Canada. Interestingly, the barriers faced by these successful immigrants on breaking into the labor market are not different from those described in the literature, such as the need for information (Sparks & Wolfson, 2001; George & Chaze, 2009) or hiring practices that rely on referrals and so are discriminatory to newcomers (Liu, 2007; George et al, 2012). It is interesting that none of the participants mentioned gender as a barrier to the job-seeking process. The facilitating factors highlighted through the discussions are also those reiterated in the literature and on the websites of many immigrant-serving organizations that stress the importance of mentors (Allies, 2003), networks in labor market outcomes (Livingston, 2006; Bauder, 2005; George & Chaze, 2009), soft or ‘tacit’ skills (Sakamoto, Chin & Young, 2010) and upgrading education or re-qualifying (Bannerjee & Verma, 2009).



The success strategies highlighted by the participants in their narratives can be seen as manifestations of internalized, neo-liberal discourses on immigrant settlement that put the onus of settlement and finding work on the immigrants, and on private arrangements between the immigrant and their networks. In the context of mental health, Teghtsoonian notes how neoliberal discourses that stress “responsibilization” place the onus of problem solving on the individual and communities, instead of on government-funded services (Teghtsoonian, 2009, p. 28). A similar phenomenon has been noted in the immigrant settlement literature, in which the inability of the immigrant to find suitable work becomes framed as a deficiency on the part of the immigrant (Guo, 2009; Sakamoto et al, 2013) that needs to be remedied; rather than structural inequalities that require government intervention. Such discourses are readily available for consumption on government websites and are embedded in publicly-funded settlement services that cater their services to helping immigrants become more autonomous and responsible for their own integration. Such gender- and race-neutral discourses would suggest that given the right support, and through effort, will and perseverance, immigrants’ economic success is possible. At the same time, participants also resisted and challenged these neo-liberal discourses when they discussed structural barriers to immigrant employment and the need to build broader alliances for advocacy.

Participants of the roundtable discussions spoke of the need to get together on a pan Indo-Canadian platform to build alliances and provide a supportive network within the Indian community. Such a platform was envisioned as sustaining a better brand image for Indian immigrants, as well as being one that would take an advocacy role that challenges systemic barriers facing Indo-Canadians. The participants noted, however the inherent fragmentation of the Indian community along regional/language/caste/religion as a huge barrier to such a network.

This paper sought to learn from the success of Indo-Canadians who had a successful economic integration into Canada. Learning from their success has allowed us to understand the tacit knowledge of these immigrants. Schechter (2010) informs us that possible limitations of success-based learning is that it “often leads to actions that preserve the status quo.” In this paper, we saw how some of this happens in the internalization of the neo-liberal discourse by the participants. Additionally we found that learning from success does not take into consideration the systemic barriers that sometimes are outside the locus of control of the individual. This paper has identified and allowed for a nuanced understanding of the efforts taken by individuals to succeed, and of the importance of systemic level factors that impede or facilitate these efforts. The official discourse on immigrant employment focuses on individual responsibility, and the settlement sector’s efforts are directed towards improving the individuals’ capacity to meet these responsibilities. However, these efforts are not enough in light of systemic factors, such as referral-based hiring practices or ethnic discrimination, which need to be eliminated so that the individual can succeed.

Based on the findings of this inductive analysis, the authors of this paper suggest a tentative framework for successful immigrant integration that takes into account various factors at three interrelated levels, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Proposed framework for successful immigrant economic integration:**

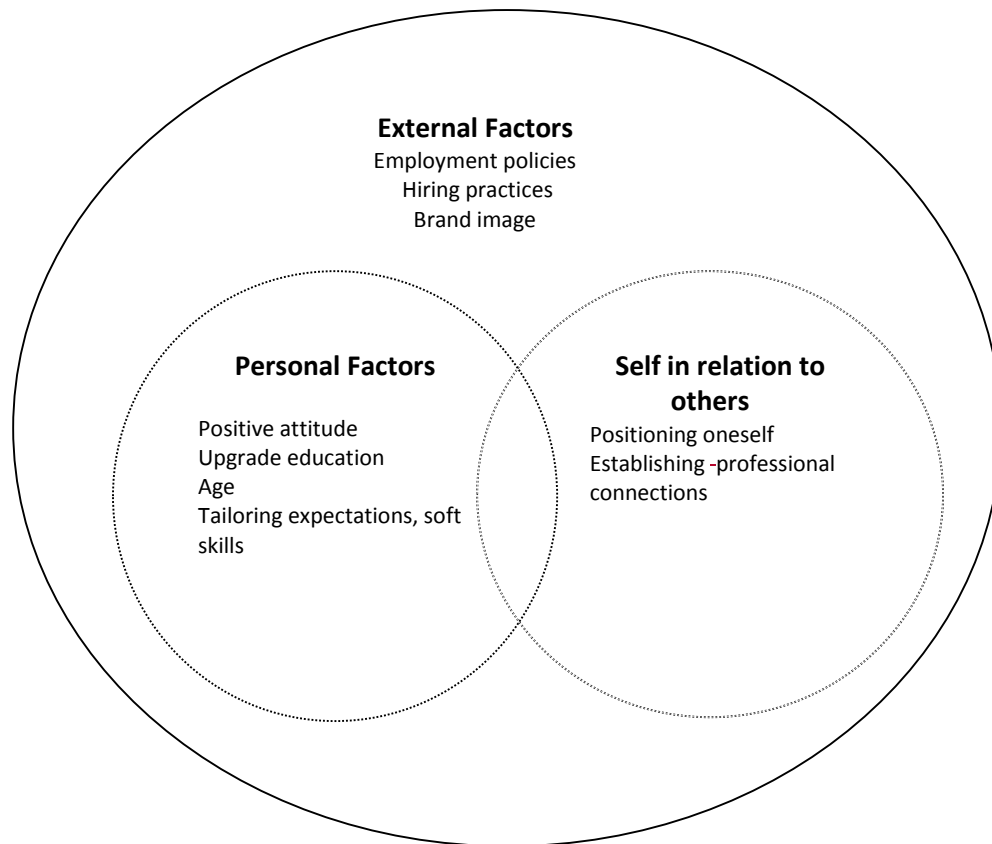


Figure 1 includes two interrelated inner circles embedded in a larger circle. The first inner circle relates to personal factors, such as age, and to the steps an individual needs to take in order to work on themselves, such as having a positive attitude, being willing to upgrade one's credentials, tailoring expectations and improving one's soft skills. Related to the first circle is the second circle, which includes the individual's relationship with others, which assists in navigating the market, positioning oneself accordingly and establishing professional relationships through networking, volunteering and training. Both of these circles are embedded within larger social factors, such as policies, and larger networks for advocacy. Further quantitative research is suggested to explore the relative importance of each of these factors and their interrelationships, and to establish the validity of the framework.

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