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Training and developing non-Irish workers
The perspectives of interested stakeholders

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore the challenges facing Irish organisations in the training and development of non-Irish workers. It analyses the importance of fluency in the host country's language and the approach taken by organisations in relation to language training. In-depth semi-structured interviews provide significant insights for the policies and practices of multiple stakeholders.

Design/methodology/approach – The empirical research comprised 33 in-depth interviews conducted with employers, employees, trade unions and regulatory bodies, and an objective content analysis provided insights into the challenges Irish organisations face in the training and development of non-Irish workers.

Findings – The results indicate that Irish organisations are given little advice or support regarding the development of non-Irish workers. The study concludes that organisations should re-consider current approaches to cultural diversity training and development of these workers, prioritising the provision of English language training for these workers. The study maintains that an understanding of cultural differences is a vital component in the training of this cohort of workers.

Research limitations/implications – Further research is required in this area. This could include an investigation into the levels of transfer of learning upon completion of training programmes for non-Irish workers, and an evaluation of the understanding of cultural learning styles among trainers.

Practical implications – Learning and development (L&D) initiatives are dependent on English language supports, which will ultimately be central to the successful training and development of non-Irish workers, and provision of affordable high-quality English language classes is crucial. An understanding of cultural differences, diversity and inclusion is equally important if this cohort of workers is to thrive in an Irish working environment.

Social implications – The government's role must be considered a priority, assisting organisations in relation to their strategies for L&D.

Originality/value – There has been a paucity of research on the issue of L&D for migrant workers in an Irish context. This paper contributes to the discussion and provides guidelines for employers and opinions for policymakers.

Keywords Cultural differences, Cultural diversity, Diversity/Inclusion, Language acquisition, Learning styles, Legal training requirements

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper explores the challenges Irish organisations face in their approach to the training, learning and development (L&D) of a multicultural workforce. It examines a gap in the research that exists between the theories and real-life practices of L&D with employees from diverse cultures. In addressing this gap, the research investigates approaches adopted by these organisations, giving all stakeholders an opportunity to

put forward their opinions. It provides a balanced view of current practices, with stakeholders including individuals, groups or organisations that can affect or be affected by the strategies and approach to training and development of this cohort of workers. It gave interested stakeholders an opportunity to express their opinions regarding the challenges and issues now confronted by Irish organisations, and this produced wide-ranging views and evidence from those with a direct interest in this topic. The author defines current practice and strategies for L&D in a multicultural workforce, and further considers the issue of language acquisition for these workers.

Hopkins (1997, p. 5) described cultural diversity as "an individual's affinity or identification with a particular cultural dimension which may include, but is not limited to, the following: race, ethnicity, nationality, and colour". It is the "nationality" component of cultural diversity that is most important, and for this reason, the term "non-Irish workers" in this study refers to those people living and working in Ireland who were not originally born here but who have moved for economic reasons. The author defines a non-Irish worker as anyone who has come from the UK, European Union (EU) or non-EU countries for the purposes of gaining employment in Ireland, either for the short term (up to three years) or for the long term (indefinitely). The number of non-Irish workers has been increasing year-on-year since 2001, and in 2014, there were approximately 564,200 migrants in Ireland (CSO, 2013). This has a significant impact on the cultural diversity of Irish organisations, and their approach to this group of workers is at the heart of this study.

Much research has been conducted in the area of cultural diversity and the training and development of multicultural workers, but relatively few studies have taken place in an Irish context and whether language acquisition is important for their integration into the organisation is also missing from research. This study is a starting point for such a discussion and for further studies and is therefore an important topic in relation to development and training issues for this cohort of workers. As human resource development professionals have for some time been grappling with the concept of managing in a multinational, culturally diverse environment, the contribution of this paper to the literature and the implications to practice are significant.

The study also investigates the need, where there is one, for non-Irish workers to be fluent in the language in their new host country. The researcher examines the policies of various organisations in relation to the requirement to be proficient in English, particularly in relation to the training of this cohort of workers. Stakeholders outline their opinions in relation to language acquisition, and its importance for the ongoing development of non-Irish workers.

In sharing findings from the qualitative study, involving 33 interviews with interested stakeholders, the author explores the issues as explained by the various groups and proposes recommendations for the successful development of this important group of workers for government and employers. She views the findings from a multi-stakeholder perspective, and offers an effective way forward for these and other Irish organisations in the development of their diverse workforces.

Literature review

Moran *et al.*, authors of "Managing Cultural Diversities", suggest that anyone with any global experience no longer needs to be convinced that "culture counts". They quote Schein as suggesting that at the root of all issues, "we are likely to find communication

failures, and cultural misunderstandings" (Schein, 1993 quoted in Moran *et al.*, 2007, p. 4). There is no universally accepted definition of national culture according to Baldwin *et al.* (2006). However, because culture impacts performance, morale and productivity at work (Moran *et al.*, 2007), it is obvious to organisations and managers the world over that national culture and cultural differences should be studied, examined and analysed to ensure success both organisationally and globally (Gandz, 2001; Monks, 2007, Flynn, 2008). In this paper, the word "culture" refers to *national culture* as opposed to organisational culture.

Diversity and cultural differences

There is broad agreement in the literature that the influence of national culture on organisations is positive and has many benefits for the organisation (Gandz, 2001; Monks, 2007; Flynn, 2008). The value of diversity, according to English (2002, p. 203), is that "it provides an exciting mix of people; a wider pool of skills; synergy; better decision-making; increased creativity; and success in an intercultural and multicultural workplace". However according to Roberson (2006, p. 234):

> The management of diversity is more complex than is currently articulated in both practitioner and scholarly research … there is a critical difference between merely having diversity in an organization's workforce and developing the organizational capacity to leverage diversity as a resource […].

Several models and well-defined strategies have been developed in response to challenges facing multicultural workplaces. In an attempt to assist organisations in their understanding of different cultures, anthropologists have identified several dimensions of national cultures. For example, Hofstede *et al.*'s (2010) six-dimensional model is, despite many criticisms, the most widely discussed approach, and has been used extensively in research by both academics and organisations. Hofstede's research in the IBM study of a multinational corporation enabled researchers and theorists to examine national culture and cultural differences from a scientific viewpoint for the first time. According to his study, countries vary along six cultural dimensions, which he suggested explained the major cultural differences between national groups. He labels these dimensions as "power distance", "uncertainty avoidance", "individualism/collectivism", "masculinity/femininity", "long term versus short term" and the indulgence as opposed to restraint dimension. Hofstede's model has been used by researchers and practitioners throughout business management to examine the role of cultural differences within an organisation. Research by the GLOBE foundation (2010) and the CRANET Survey (2012) group has also looked at cultural differences among European nations in this manner and points out the importance of an understanding of cultural differences for the management of these workers.

Learning to manage a multicultural workforce is essential for the effective management of emerging global corporations. As Moran *et al.* (2007) suggest, an effectively managed culturally diverse workforce is one that is seen to celebrate its employees' national cultures, value cultural differences and learn from other cultures in an all-embracing and respectful manner.

Learning and development provision for non-Irish workers

That the L&D of staff is critical to organisational success is a given, but the development and training of a culturally diverse workforce is one of the greatest challenges facing

organisations in the twenty-first century (Flynn, 2008). While heretofore cultural differences have not impacted Irish organisations' strategies for L&D, they have gradually had to face the same complex issues encountered by multicultural organisations across the globe.

The research on national cultures indicates that learning styles vary according to cultural orientation, with, for example, Asian students preferring "reflective observation", while Western students prefer "active experimentation" (Jackson, 1995). Lucas *et al.* (2006, p. 152) agree that "the implications are significant for the appropriate choice of L&D activity to match learning styles in different cultures". Jackson (1995) has also investigated a variety of international cultures primarily with a view to using Kolb's learning styles model in different cultures. Jackson notes that learning styles vary in terms of what he refers to as the "receptivity" towards either practical or theoretical learning. He also discusses the learners' preference for a "rational sequential" or a "more intuitive bias towards filtering and judging information" (p. 42), and he highlights the fact that some learners prefer to learn in a logical, scientific manner, while others prefer a more subjective approach. The results of all of these studies have significant implications for trainers and HR specialists.

Training approaches must also be considered, and research carried out by Roderigues *et al.* (2000) suggests that a training approach that is effective in one culture may be wholly inappropriate and unsuitable in another. In their research, they examined the differences in approaches used by trainers in different parts of the world and explored the differences between what they refer to as a "teacher-centred" versus a "hands-on" or "student-led" approach. Again, referring to Hofstede *et al.*'s (2001) model, they suggested that the "hands-on" approach is more prevalent in cultures or nations exhibiting a low power distance, high individualism and low uncertainty avoidance culture.

These cultural differences should lead to different approaches to L&D where employees come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, and indeed should be considered if learning objectives are to be reached. Thus, learning objectives should be couched in a way that respects cultural attributes. One example is research on Hispanic worker safety, where Sanders-Smith (2007) suggests how a safety training programme should take individualistic and collectivistic cultural characteristics into account. She proposes that workers with collectivist characteristics should have safety training that focuses on the importance of the safety and security of the entire work group, while those of an individualistic and independent disposition should be provided with training that is not group-reliant.

It is very clear from the literature that there is no "one best way" of organising L&D, but fundamental issues such as national culture must be considered if organisations are to ever get it right.

"Researchers have clearly established that there is no single or dual learning style for the members of any cultural, national, racial or religious group" (Burke-Guild, 2001). Burke-Guild (2001) does not state that national culture explains all L&D differences. He instead suggests that some differences can clearly be explained as a result of curriculum design, teacher's expectations and philosophies and students' past experiences. This notwithstanding, the science of L&D must place cultural issues at the centre of scientific investigation. Examining how students learn, as well as respecting and attempting to

understand their specific environments and national cultures, will help lead to more effective teaching.

Language acquisition

Cultural differences can also mean language differences. Much of the literature suggests that a proficiency of the host country's language can be a useful tool in breaking down the cultural barriers experienced by some immigrants and enhancing intercultural effectiveness (Mamman, 1995; Birman *et al.*, 2002).

Understanding and accounting for the way people communicate is a crucial component in the appreciation of cultural differences. Taking one aspect of Hofstede's dimensions, the relative power and status of the communicators – the context in which communication takes place – can translate to misunderstanding or a lack of comprehension. Indeed, one of the issues facing many companies today is the requirement to provide training in a language that is clearly understood by the workforce. Worker understanding is critical if this type of training is to be effective and Irish Health and Safety legislation stipulates that employers must provide instruction and training "in a form, manner and, as appropriate, language that is reasonably likely to be understood by the employee concerned". In Ireland's growing non-Irish workforce, this obligation places a significant burden on managers who do not always understand the cultural *and* language difficulties of their workers. Moreover, effective communication of risk in a multicultural workforce is not simply a case of translating words into other languages. According to Neuman-smith (2008), it involves a high level of awareness and understanding of cultural values and norms, backed up with relevant communication methods and skills.

Based on the above discussion, this study explored the challenges facing organisations and the development of their non-Irish employees. It assessed employers' understanding of cultural differences in relation to their current implementation of L&D strategies for these workers. It also examined the importance of language and worker fluency in the host country's language.

Research approach

A qualitative approach offered an in-depth understanding of the challenges organisations face from the perspective of the participants. The aim and objectives of the study were derived from reviewing the literature. This drove the deductive aspect of the study and provided a conceptual framework on which to focus the research. The purpose of the research was to assess the current L&D strategies for non-Irish workers in some Irish organisations. Little is known about the success or failure of Irish organisations in their approach to this new workforce and this research investigates the approaches of the participants and explores best practices in the area, potentially assisting and influencing future approaches.

Study respondents

Thirty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews provided invaluable insights into the policies and practices of a range of stakeholders. To reflect all viewpoints, referred to as "purposive or judgemental sampling" by Neuman (2000, p. 198), the researcher used non-random sampling and selected individuals based on a preset number of cases in each of several predetermined categories. The sampling frame was a non-probability, convenience sample where the respondents were selected at the convenience of the

researcher, via their organisations. Stakeholders were chosen primarily for their understanding of the topic and ability to provide a wide variety of views on the topic in question. Human resource managers and training managers who contributed to the research were chosen to represent companies that employ large numbers of non-Irish workers from both the public and private sectors. The trade union representatives and non-Irish employees interviewed for this study provided insight from the point of view of the employees, while the regulatory bodies (such as the Equality Authority and the Health and Safety Authority) offered yet another perspective as well as in-depth information related to the legal issues employers face when managing this cohort of workers. The sample included two hotel groups, two public transport companies, a regional airline, a mapping agency, a retail/wholesale company, an airport baggage handling provider, two hospitals, a medical devices company, a surveying company, a construction company and four public/semi-state companies. Government agencies interviewed included the Health and Safety Authority, the Equality Authority, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation and the Small Firms Association, as well as trade union groups (including representatives from SIPTU, IMPACT and the ICTU). Employees were also interviewed from the tourism, aviation and IT industries, and the public sector. Agreement was obtained from L&D specialists, training managers, human resource managers and health and safety managers within the aforementioned organisations. An in-depth interview with the Minister for State for Integration in Ireland concentrated on the Irish Government's approach to the issues in the study (Table I).

Data collection

All 33 interviews took place during a four-month period using a standard set of questions for each participant. The questions were left sufficiently broad to facilitate case-specific responses and build a more complete picture of the approaches, practices and policies in use across various groups. Questions were, for the most part, the same for each stakeholder group, and covered topics regarding the general approaches by stakeholders in the training and development of their culturally diverse workforces, the provision of L&D opportunities for a diverse workforce and the importance of language acquisition and its provision. Questions for the regulatory bodies focused more on the legal aspects of approaches used by various organisations, but participants from this sector were also asked about the importance of development opportunities for a culturally diverse workforce, the importance of language acquisition and whether they felt employers were in fact struggling with this new workforce. (see Appendices for the theme sheet for different stakeholders.) Each interview lasted 60 min, and the researcher transcribed all of the recorded interviews. Transcriptions were synchronous, so that findings and other crosschecked notes would be fresh.

Data analysis

The process was repeated, checking and cross-checking with other interviews ad documents as themes began to emerge from the data. Data analysis therefore proceeded as data continued to be gathered. Interpretivistic analysis of the interviews provided a valuable source of information to address the questions posed in the research. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and were referred to only

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Table I.
Study participants

Participant ID	Organisation	Details	Position in company
1	Minister of State for Integration, Dail Eireann	Minister Conor Lenihan, Minister for State with special responsibility for Integration Policy	Minister
RB2	IBEC	Irish Employer group with 7,500 members from all industry sectors	Director
RB3	The Equality Authority	Independent body set up under the Employment Equality legislation, 1998	Inspector in Statutory Body
RB4	Health and Safety Authority	Authority responsible for administration and enforcement of health and safety in workplaces	Inspector in Statutory Body
RB5	SFA	Small Firms Association representing small enterprises in Ireland	Director
ER1	Wholesale and retail organisation	Irish-owned wholesale and retail organisation with 8,000 staff	Human Resource Manager
ER2	Aircraft maintenance company	Aviation sector employer	Human Resource Manager
ER3	Airline	Aviation sector employer	Human Resource Manager
ER4	Construction	Fire security company	Director/Owner
ER5	Public transport company	Public transport in Dublin	Human Resource and Training Manager
ER6	Small government department	Public sector government department–finance area	Human Resource Manager
ER7	Surveying company	Company based in Dublin	Director/Owner
ER8	Regional hospital	Hospital in West of Ireland	Human Resource Manager
ER9	Banking organisation	One of the largest banks	Training Manager
ER10	Regional public transport company	Public transport for rest of Ireland	Human Resource Manager
ER11	Food processing company	Food processing wholesale company in Dublin	Human Resource Manager
ER12	Hotel group	Hotel group situated in West of Ireland	Human Resource Manager
ER13	Medical devices company	Large multinational medical devices company in midlands	Human Resource/Training Manager
ER14	Public sector company	Large public sector company–information provision	Training Manager
ER15	Hospital	Dublin City centre hospital	Human Resource Manager
C1	Health and Safety Authority	Inspector working specifically in construction sector	Inspector

Participant ID	Organisation	Details	Position in company
C2	Training organisation	Training organisation working with ethnic entrepreneurs with particular interest in language training for migrants	Training Manager
C3	HR consultancy	Hospitality sector in Dublin area	HR/Training Consultant
C4	Risk management consultancy	Specific interest in the construction sector	Director
TU1	Trade union	Small trade union for workers in public sector	Shop Stewart
TU2	Polish/Latvian trade union organisers	Large trade union in Dublin	Organiser for Polish workers Organiser for Latvian workers
TU3	Large public sector trade union	Large trade union for workers in public sector	Assistant General Secretary
TU4	Trade union body	Largest civil society organisation, umbrella organisation representing and campaigning on behalf of workers	Industrial Officer public sector

Table I.

by code (e.g. ER2 was Employer No. 2, TU1 was a trade union representative, EE1 was an employee and RB3 was one of the regulatory body representatives).

The position taken in analysing the data in this case came from diverse sources but was influenced by Parker and Roffey (1997). Although the advice offered by Strauss and Corbin (1997) is quite specific, it allowed the researcher to follow their general advice while making particular choices in investigation methods and data interpretation. In this way, the author borrowed from these procedural methods in the analysis of the data, allowing the inductive phase of the research to identify key themes emerging from the data.

The analysis, after the fieldwork was completed, began with the development of a fairly generic coding system, which was applicable across contexts. This system sorted through these materials to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups and stakeholders, relationships between variables and common sequences.

Results

The main purpose of this work was to assess the understanding of how cultural differences impact L&D strategies for non-Irish workers within some Irish organisations. Several themes emerged from the interviews with participants and while all stakeholders agreed that the training and development of a culturally different workforce was important, not all agreed how this should be achieved.

Diversity and cultural differences

Employers' perspective
Employers interviewed in this study expressed anxiety about their understanding of cultures and different cultural dimensions, and expressed that they are finding it hard to come to terms with the nature of cultural differences and the management of diversity in their workforces. One employer from the transport sector stated that, "trying to convey the fact that difference is welcomed and that everyone should be treated equally is not easy" (ER5). It would seem that the dimensions proposed by Hofstede, Trompenaars and others are not understood by organisations in the study, and while some employers suggested that cultural differences were taken into account, there was little evidence of this in practice.

Despite other excellent training opportunities provided by all of the organisations in this research, only 8.7 per cent of the organisations provide cultural diversity training. These few employers, albeit in the minority, see a real requirement to continue with diversity training. Two employers spoke about including this type of training in either dignity at work or induction sessions, explaining:

> It would be better to include cultural diversity training under the Dignity in the Workplace Training, or include this type of training during induction sessions, as it really helps to integrate workers (ER3, ER5).

However, employers in this research feel that all employees, irrespective of their nationality, should be treated in the same way and suggest that their non-Irish workers do not want to be singled out for special treatment:

> Some non-Irish nationals have expressed the opinion that they do not really want to be made to feel different and do not want anything specifically done for them (ER7).

Some even shy away from "special days", proposing that everyone should be "treated equally, but not necessarily the same", with some feeling that to focus on cultural differences is "counter-productive". One HR manager proposed that:

> Culture should be seen in the context of the broader "diversity" agenda, taking all diversity issues into account, for example, gender, age, disability as well as cultural background (ER5).

With increases in the numbers migrating to Ireland – in 2014, there were approximately 564,200 migrants in Ireland (CSO, 2013) – an understanding of cultural differences is vital for policymakers, organisations and particularly those with responsibility for the training and development of this workforce. All organisations in the research attested to the fact that immigration is to be welcomed and diversity among their businesses was a very positive thing – many agreeing that they "could not manage without these workers" and that they brought "new and interesting perspectives that have been food for thought" (ER2, ER10). However, these same Irish organisations are slow to develop policies for managing diversity, despite the research suggesting that it is of benefit to companies.

Employees and trade union perspective
While other stakeholders agree with the points made by the employers, they felt there was a lack of understanding of the issues among some Irish employers. One participant from the regulatory sector suggested:

> There is still a little naiveté among Irish employers with very little understanding of the concept of diversity. Employers are struggling with the ethnic, cultural and nationality mix of their workforces but diversity training is a must if these misunderstandings are to be avoided in the future (RB3).

Indeed, there seems to be a general consensus among stakeholders that organisations are not dealing with cultural differences in any coherent manner. Interestingly, however, employees and trade unions agreed with employers in this research that migrant workers would mainly prefer to be treated similarly, with one trade union representative feeling that there should in fact be nothing focused on these workers, as he felt "people may not want to be separated out, even for favourable treatment" (TU3). This is in line with the views of most of the employers in this research.

Learning and development provision for non-Irish workers
While the provision of a wide range of training and development initiatives by some of the companies in this study can be seen as best practice, the participants are in agreement that trainers in Irish organisations do not appear to have an adequate understanding of the different approaches to training and development for a culturally diverse workforce. Their understanding of different styles of learning is confined to those proposed by Kolb, Honey and Mumford, which largely ignore the differences in learning among different cultures.

Employer and employee perspective
Both the employer and employee groups were asked if their trainers understood the concept of "different learners" and how this idea of different types of learning might apply to those from different cultures. The question posed to each group was "Do your trainers take cultural differences into account in their training, i.e. student centred –v–

teacher centred learning, group –v– individual?" All answers were negative and the training specialists, for the most part, have not taken any of these cultural differences into account. When questioned about the necessity to provide different types of learning opportunities, participants from these organisations suggested:

> Our trainers would understand that they should take different styles, such as those suggested by Kolb, into account, however, they would not have an understanding of cultural differences in learning styles (ER4, ER7).

One public sector employer was adamant that that their trainers would not have an understanding of this at all, suggesting that their trainers were "not that sophisticated" (ER2). A small number of organisations, most notably in the health care, aviation and public transport sectors, believed that their own trainers would understand this concept (ER7, ER15), but this was unusual among those interviewed. None of the non-Irish employees interviewed had seen any evidence of different training approaches in their own training courses, and all employees agreed with other participants when questioned about their organisation's understanding of cultural differences in terms of learning styles. One suggested that their training was:

> Very uniform, with no account taken of differences in nationalities (EE5).

Regulatory bodies' perspective

Policymakers interviewed for this research clearly understand the need to address this issue and recognise that cultural differences are not being taken into account by employers, and that this would need to be addressed if transfer of training was to be successful in future. One regulatory body stated that:

> In the broader context of cultural diversity, the Department of Science and Education had been very slow to re-train teachers who were dealing with very culturally diverse students (RB3).

Trade unions and regulatory bodies agree that there is in fact a gap in the provision of training, and that there is currently very little expertise in the area of training of a diverse workforce in Ireland. There needs to be an "awareness and sensitivity" to different cultures according to one trade union group, without "over concentrating on the different person" (TU3). Much of the training provided to non-Irish workers is induction training and legally required health and safety training, and while these are both extremely important, there seems only to be an emphasis on statutorily required training for these workers. Indeed some regulatory bodies and trade unions interviewed for the research suggested that this type of legally required training was the biggest priority for employers:

> Learning and development initiatives were not high on the employer's list, except in the case of health and safety training and other legally required training (RB2).

Language acquisition

While the literature points to the importance of language acquisition and training for the integration of migrant workers, there seems to be very little consensus across countries as to who should provide this training and this lack of consensus is also present in the current study.

The Irish Minister for Integration agreed that fluency in the home country's language was particularly important and would be defined by the ability with which migrants could understand the English language as a transactional tool to facilitate progress in the workforce and in society. He felt that:

> There could be some problems particularly associated with the level of English proficiency of these workers, which could be a barrier to their involvement in this vision for Ireland's economy. While Ireland is moving up the value chain, in particular in becoming a knowledge economy, it does not make sense to have a significant cohort of your workforce unable to communicate effectively in English.

Crucially, the Minister stated that his Department will not provide English language classes and would in fact like to make it a mandatory requirement for employers to provide such classes in the future. He also saw it as more of an issue for employees themselves rather than the Government:

> I am increasingly looking down the line of making this a mandatory requirement, whether in terms of giving them (employees) time off to learn English, or to conditionalise their retention of the job after a probationary period and linking it to proficiency in the English language.

While the Minister insists that he understands the problems facing migrant workers, he suggests that the role of the state is to set a standard of English proficiency, but it is the employer's responsibility to achieve that target, thus placing the onus for English language training and English language acquisition on employers and employees, respectively, with no Irish Government assistance for either grouping.

Regulatory bodies' and trade union perspective
One regulatory body in agreement with the Minister stated that "the biggest stumbling block left in Policy terms is language training" (RB3). Another from the Health and Safety Authority agreed also, stating:

> Obviously English language proficiency is one of the key issues. The problem facing employers is the language proficiency issue, with difficulty being experienced with workers not understanding English (RB4).

A trade union participant insisted that "Language is the real barrier", with ability to speak English definitely an issue. He emphasised the importance of language stating:

> There are huge issues around language or lack of cultural understanding and the majority of non-English speaking workers, and these workers are most vulnerable in terms of workplace safety with lack of English the biggest problem for workers coming to Ireland […] as these workers are most at risk (TU3).

Employers' perspective
Many of the stakeholders in this research disagreed with the Minister on this issue and argued strongly that language acquisition should be dealt with immediately through government policy on training initiatives and funding of language training by the Department of Education. Regarding the provision of language classes, there is disagreement among the employers interviewed on this issue, with some suggesting that it is "employee's own responsibility", while others feel that because employees are being recruited with good levels of English, "language classes are unnecessary". Very few intended to provide English classes for staff in the future. Employers were generally

adamant that they could not afford to provide English classes for their workers, and those that have provided them in the past claim the classes were unsuccessful:

> Classes were not well attended, were not successful, and trainers were in some instances not qualified or were inexperienced (ER3).

One Romanian employer/manager suggested that employees should be "forced to learn English", he saw it as being for "their own benefit" and felt that "when you are in Rome you do what the Romans do".

Employees' perspective

Employees agreed with employers and others suggesting that while fluency in English was most important for them, they did not expect employers or the government to provide free language classes. One employee interviewed suggested:

> If the Government provided free lessons it would be good, but […] if I want to find a better job, I need to improve on my own first, because it is in my own interest to learn English (EE4).

Another employee wondered whether it would "do any good" for the government to provide English classes, with employees interviewed seeing language acquisition as a problem they themselves must resolve.

While all organisations in this research agreed that training, communication and integration of workers would be easier if all workers had a proficiency in the English language, not all could agree how this can be achieved. Lack of understanding of English is proving to be a problem for employers and employees alike when it comes to training of these employees. It is imperative so that all parties in this debate come to some agreement regarding the provision and funding of English language classes, with the accreditation of appropriate numbers of courses through education institutes and the provision of qualified trainers also a priority.

Discussion

This study assessed the current L&D strategies for non-Irish workers in a number of organisations and investigated whether the successful development of these workers also depends on a fluency in the host country language. It provides insights into the many problems employers and employees face: a lack of understanding of cultural diversity, issues related to training and development of non-Irish workers and challenges of language acquisition and proficiency in English.

There is broad agreement that the influence of national culture on organisations and on management strategies is positive, and has significant benefits for the organisation (Gandz, 2001; Monks, 2007; Flynn, 2008); however, the management of diversity is complex (Roberson, 2006). The value of diversity, according to English (2002, p. 203), is that "it provides an exciting mix of people; a wider pool of skills; synergy; better decision-making; increased creativity; and success in an intercultural and multicultural workplace". But even in countries with historically large immigrant populations, workforce diversity seems to be a novel and under-researched concept (Moran *et al.*, 2007).

While many propose celebrating diversity (Monks, 2007 and Flynn, 2008), advising the Irish Government and Irish businesses to ensure the development of their culturally diverse workforces as a method for sustaining competitive advantage, employers interviewed for this research feel that there is no help available for the provision of

training or assistance for organisations with diversity management initiatives. Understanding cultural differences is seen as extremely important for organisations, with Hofstede, Kluckhone, Roberson, Monks and others emphasising the importance of the value and benefits of an inclusive workforce. Learning to manage cultural differences, according to Moran *et al.* (2007), is essential for the effective management of emerging global corporations. However, Ireland has been slow to develop policies for managing diversity, despite the research suggesting that it is of benefit to companies in terms of a reduction in staff turnover and absenteeism, improved employee relations and improved workplace innovation and creativity (Monks, 2007).

Employers in this study argued that continuing to employ non-Irish workers was a priority and important for the continuing competitive advantage; however, the researcher felt that these same employers did not have a clear understanding of the issues facing these workers in terms of their successful integration into these organisations. Employees also reported that employers did not understand their needs, and while they did not wish to be "treated differently", they felt that employers should take diversity into account and make allowances for their lack of understanding in an organisational context. It is also important that cultural diversity training be provided for management and supervisory levels to ensure an understanding of cultural differences through the workforce.

L&D for non-Irish workers is also seen as a problem by many of those participating in this research. Employers provide a great deal of training to all of their workers; however, much of the training provided is induction training and legally required health and safety training, and while these are extremely important, there seems to be a near-exclusive emphasis on statutorily required training for these workers. Indeed, some regulatory bodies and trade unions interviewed for the research suggested that other L&D initiatives were not always prioritised by employers.

Much of the literature concerning the L&D strategies necessary for culturally different workers emphasises an understanding of different styles and preferences (Jackson, 1995; Lucas *et al.*, 2006). In the current research, trainers in these organisations do not have an understanding of the various approaches required. Their understanding of different styles of learning is confined to those proposed by Kolb, Honey and Mumford, which largely ignore the differences in learning among diverse cultures. While some organisations indicated that their trainers – and particularly those from outsourced training companies – did have an understanding of the differences in learning styles among different cultures, this was not the case for most organisations. Further, while some employees suggested that the trainers in their organisations understood different cultures, the researcher now believes that the questions in this data collection method were not explicit enough to reveal the truth behind their levels of understanding of the concept.

In many respects, Ireland is not any different from other countries in this regard. Australian universities, for example, develop and implement programmes in China, with a limited understanding of differences between Australian and Chinese students (Heffernan *et al.*, 2010). Although culture has begun to be addressed in the field of instructional system design, according to some writers, it is still overlooked or undervalued in the design of training programmes and the development of non-national workers (Rogers *et al.*, 2007; Thomas *et al.*, 2002). Parrish and Linder-VanBerschot (2010) agree, posing the argument that for instruction to do the most good for students,

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trainers must be aware of the cultures of their learners and how those cultures manifest themselves in learning preferences.

It is vital that trainers understand the cultural differences of their learners if education is to be successful for these workers. Academic institutions providing "train the trainer" programmes must equip trainers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address this challenge by not only arming them with the ability to recognise different types of learners, but also the flexibility to adjust courses to meet the learner's preferred method of information retention.

While the provision of English language training was seen by all stakeholders as an important consideration, who should provide this language training was a subject of much discussion among employers and regulatory bodies. This is a problem in many other countries also, with lack of consensus as to who should provide training for these cohorts of workers. (Dunn *et al.*, 2001; NESC, 2006; IVEA, 2007). Many find it difficult to progress with training initiatives for those who have a poor grasp of the English language and provision of affordable high-quality English language classes is vital and employers should encourage workers to attend classes with either financial support or by offering time off to attend. English language supports will ultimately be central to the successful establishment of L&D initiatives and, by extension, the L&D of non-Irish workers.

Policy implications
General policy lessons from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (2006, p. 153) Report include social and economic integration and require that immigrants are able to communicate well in the language of the host community, economically independent and able to find work commensurate with their abilities and qualifications. This research also indicates that providing for this integration is important if migrants are to become part of our society and of the organisations in which they live and work.

Sectoral initiatives should be considered where co-operation among industries in the areas of diversity, legal issues, integration strategies and L&D for non-Irish workers will benefit all. Rather than attempting to achieve these goals alone, industries and sectors must collaborate and share information and knowledge to the best advantage of all.

The future impact of migration will depend on a broad range of factors, including general economic conditions both in Ireland and across the globe. Much will also depend on government policy and how migration is managed. While support from the government seems to be forthcoming with proposals to foster integration among non-Irish workers, there is scant evidence of financial support for employers or employees in the achievement of this aim. Ireland continues to encourage and welcome foreign workers, but the policy implications for the government in the integration of these workers remain central to retaining Ireland's competitiveness in a global environment. If we fail to realise that "diversity pays" (Roberson, 2006; Monks, 2007), we will not profit as a country from migration. Much can be accomplished through development of appropriate policies and strategies and while Ireland is relatively new to the immigration experience, it is evident that we now have an opportunity to examine training and development strategies from other countries. We can benefit from their experience by avoiding their mistakes and adopting their positive models of good

practice culminating in a positive approach for promoting migration policies that acknowledge diversity.

Of course, policies relating to migration must take account of international migration. Government policies regarding migration cannot be developed in isolation from other policies or connections with other countries. This research provides guidance for organisations and the government eager to serve the needs of this cohort of workers.

Practice implications for learning and development specialists

This study has a number of important implications for training professionals and for managers of culturally diverse organisations, and the findings suggest a need for cultural diversity training and development for managers and professionals in intercultural situations. All workers, irrespective of race or cultural background, must be provided with training and development programmes to enhance their effectiveness, and employers should consider the implications of reducing L&D opportunities for their non-Irish cohort of workers. In relation to the government's role, the findings are clear on what must be considered a priority: assisting organisations in their strategies for training and development; focusing on long-term objectives; and the attraction, retention and protection of these workers. Higher education institutes should furnish trainers and educators with an understanding of the requirements of different cultural styles of learning, thus providing much needed expertise for these workers. If sectoral initiatives are considered, with different industries and sectors collaborating and sharing information and knowledge, this will ultimately foster synergies that will benefit organisations and their employees.

Future research

Several areas of further research could guide policy and practice for the successful training and development of migrant workers. Areas of research could include investigation of attitudes and behaviours in a multicultural workplace following improvement of the economy in Ireland. An assessment of the gender-specific approaches taken in the management of cultural differences in male- versus female-orientated industries would assist in the understanding of cultural differences in L&D of various groups in Irish organisations. Among trainers and learning specialists, an evaluation of understanding of culture styles could be studied. Some measurement of the levels of English proficiency shown by non-Irish national workers upon their arrival in Ireland could also be investigated.

Summary

In the absence of any consistent and standardised approach to issues of integration, language acquisition and L&D of non-Irish workers by the government, regulatory bodies or employers, there is a risk that agencies and employers will react in an *ad hoc* and ill-informed way to these issues. Consequently, it is important to identify which L&D initiatives are being considered by employers for these workers.

While Ireland continues to encourage and welcome foreign workers, the government strategies for integration and employers' approaches to the development of their workforces remain unclear and much can be accomplished through development of appropriate strategies with input from all stakeholders. These strategies according to the findings require both funding and commitment to research from the government and other stakeholders.

Employers, according to the study findings, must ensure that employees are integrated into the fabric of the organisation by providing them with appropriate training and development opportunities, including English language training, if this is necessary. General cultural orientation, language orientation, culture-specific orientation and organisation orientation should be provided to both indigenous populations and newcomers. There is no "one best way" for organisations to manage L&D for international workers, and contextual factors including culture must be considered; however, the author suggests a multi-stakeholder approach to the issue, which would be an effective way forward for these and other Irish organisations in the development of their diverse workforces.

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Appendix

The following are questions raised with the various stakeholders for this research:

(1) What problems does your organisation face in relation to the provision of information and the training and development of their international workers (in your opinion)?

(2) What are your organisation's current learning, training and development practices in relation to their international workforce?

(3) Is your organisation assessing the effectiveness of current practices? Has there been any evaluation of courses provided to international workers to date (organisations only)?

(4) What are current approaches to induction/cultural orientation/ training – are health and safety issues covered?

(5) Are language classes provided?

(6) Do trainers take cultural differences into account in their training, i.e. student-centred vs teacher-centred learning, group vs individual?

(7) What career development initiatives are in place for international workers?

(8) What other general issues are currently facing employers in relation to the employment of international workers?

(9) Do organisations value diversity?

(10) Worker empowerment and participation are seen by some as the way forward in the management of a multicultural workforce. Do companies empower employees and ensure employee participation?

(11) How does your organisation promote exchange of ideas?

(12) Does the organisation provide policies and procedures/SOPs in multiple languages? Which documents, which languages and at what cost?

(13) Has the organisation tried "easy to read English" for its documents, policies and procedures?

(14) What training courses are provided for international workers?

(15) What health and safety training is in place for international workers specifically?

(16) Are training courses delivered in English or other languages?

(17) Has the organisation used signage to any great extent in training?

(18) Has the organisation used videos or other training aids?

(19) What other methods, aids, supports has the organisation used for training?

(20) Which methods, etc., has the organisation found most useful?

(21) What are the perceived barriers to training for this group of workers?

(22) Does the organisation carry out a training needs analysis as part of their performance management programme?

(23) Does the organisation feel that their diverse workforce offers learning opportunities?

(24) Would following initiatives help with integration of international workforce:
- integration with local staff;
- reducing language barriers;
- celebrating all holidays; and
- encouraging integration with local community.

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