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Realistic Conflict for jobs, and Selection Bias against skilled immigrants during a Recession:

Does it apply in New Zealand?

A thesis presented as part of the course requirements for a

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ABSTRACT

Only a short time ago in New Zealand, there was a shortage of people rather than places. However with the country having encountered an official recession, the purpose of this study is to determine whether Realistic Conflict plays a role in the selection of candidates. Realistic Conflict Theory states that competitiveness between groups is rational and ‘realistic’ to expect whenever resources (like jobs), are scarce. Hence greater perceived threat from immigration may predict greater job selection biases against skilled immigrants, in ‘high-churn’ nations like New Zealand. Previous research has not been able to test a role for this theory in selection bias, because there were too many jobs and too few job applicants/candidates (Coates 2003). Based on the UN principle of Alignment (of research with core stakeholder values), this project focuses on immigrants rather than employers’ perceptions, surveying $N = 100$ skilled immigrant job seekers in New Zealand who had looked for a job at least once in the last five years (2005 – 2010). Control measures included ethnicity, qualifications, number of years of experience. Antecedent measures focused on perceived realistic conflict. The criterion measure was obtaining employment, i.e.; how long a candidate had looked for a job before successfully gaining employment, and whether their country of origin was a common denominator in the success rate. The most important point of Realistic Conflict theory is that intergroup enmity and competition will arise whenever economic resources are scarce (Brewer, 1968). Analytically, key questions assessed the perceived intercultural similarity to New Zealand based on the country of origin, examined whether candidates have experienced favouritism or bias towards based on country of origin, and also the recognized socio-economic dominance of the candidates’ country-of-origin. Realistic Conflict theory and Social Identity theory are complementary, with Social Identity theory providing a cognitive explanation of how intergroup conflict can arise (perceived or otherwise), and RCT addressing the consequences of this conflict.
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