

# An empirical study of nation branding for attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to empirically assess the importance for nations of key institutional, economic, and societal factors for attracting skilled professionals from abroad. It examines the existing literature on international talent mobility and empirically tests the validity of nation branding as a strategy for attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors use secondary data from the World Economic Forum, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Martin Prosperity Institute to test six hypotheses concerning factors that attract internationally mobile skilled professionals to a foreign country to live and work.

**Findings** – The study finds that conditions of employment, quality of life, good governance, and tolerance towards people of diverse backgrounds are key issues that need to be holistically emphasized in successful nation branding campaigns aimed at attracting highly skilled professionals from abroad.

**Originality/value** – The authors use strong secondary data to reduce common method bias in the results which show that “macro” factors sway internationally mobile skilled professionals to favor some countries over others. The authors contribute to the literature on international talent flows by conceptualizing nation branding as a framework through which a variety of push and pull factors can be examined to entice and attract internationally mobile skilled professionals to a particular host-country. The findings will apply to several different types of skilled professionals including self-initiated expatriates, self-initiated corporate expatriates, and third country nationals and local foreign hires.

**Keywords** Migration, Human capital, Highly skilled workers, Nation branding, Talent mobility, Global mobility

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The World Economic Forum (2013, p. 3) emphasizes that a “nation’s human capital endowment – the skills and capacities that reside in its people – can be a more important determinant of its long-term economic success than virtually any other resource.” Modern economies require educated and skilled workforces at all levels, especially in managerial and technical roles (Scullion *et al.*, 2007; Shaffer *et al.*, 2012). As human capital becomes increasingly essential to economic growth and competitiveness, the question of how and where to source talent – especially international mobile skilled professionals – is becoming ever more important not only for companies, but for industries as well as nations (D’Costa, 2008; Favell *et al.*, 2006;



PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012). Many nations, for example, are realizing that they “must encourage an increase in foreign labor flows to meet the demands of their economies, keep up with the reach of multinational corporations, offset the adverse consequences of an aging population, stimulate research and development and/or promote entrepreneurship, and expand foreign markets” (Batalova and Lowell, 2006, p. 81).

Attracting highly skilled professionals from abroad has become a key component in workforce planning at the national level (Findlay, 2006; Hugo, 2006; Mercer Consulting, 2012), where the mobility of human capital acts as an enabler to fill skills gaps and address talent shortages while enhancing the employability and employment of the individuals involved (McDonnell *et al.*, 2012; McNulty and Inkson, 2013; Vaiman and Collings, 2013). In numerous countries, immigration barriers are being lowered to attract temporary and permanent mobile skilled professionals and incentives are offered to induce them to stay long-term and resist efforts by other countries to poach them (Bashin and Cheng, 2002; Legget, 2013; *The Straits Times*, 2010a, b). The mobility of highly skilled professionals is, thus, increasingly part of “the market-led, multilateral framework of international trade and competition not just between companies, but also between nations” (Lavenex, 2006, p. 52).

The task of attracting talent from abroad requires stakeholders and policymakers (both public and private) to embrace new strategies and practices for attracting talent (Legget, 2007; Wong, 1997) and to pay close attention to the requirements, preferences and expectations of internationally mobile skilled professionals (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012). Baruch *et al.* (2013) conceptualize work abroad in terms of seven key dimensions that skilled professionals look for, including: length of time spent in the host country; intensity of international contact through work; breadth of interactions; legal rules used to enable the foreign work; international work instigators; extent of the cultural gap between an individual’s country-of-origin and foreign workplace; and cultural sensitivity that one’s position abroad requires. Furthermore, the Boston Consulting Group and the World Economic Forum advocate the use of “nation branding” strategies to enhance the appeal of countries vying to attract talented professionals. This idea is supported by recent studies (e.g. Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Dickmann and Cerdin, 2014) in which skilled self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) were found to pay close attention to the reputation and quality of life of the countries in which they chose to live and work. Findings suggest that branding strategies need to be based on practical, instrumental, and symbolic appeals that resonate with highly educated people interested in relocating to a new country (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; World Economic Forum, 2011; Silvanto and Ryan, 2014). This suggests that, to attract the best and the brightest professionals with discerning tastes and competing opportunities, an emphasis on steady work and high wages often will not suffice (Florida, 2005; Silvanto and Ryan, 2014). Rather, enriching working conditions for the employee and safe and pleasing living conditions for his or her family will also weigh in the decision to relocate abroad, as will factors such as tolerance, openness, and good governance (Silvanto and Ryan, 2014; Carr *et al.*, 2005; Florida, 2005; Lam, 2002). Further supporting the decision by skilled professionals to work abroad is that many have a protean career orientation that encourages them to assess and value international career opportunities in terms of their values, lifestyle, and sense of personal fulfillment (Hall, 2004).

In recent years, a number of studies have devoted considerable attention to the question of what induces internationally mobile skilled professionals to voluntarily leave their home country in favor of a new one (e.g. Borstorff *et al.*, 1997; Hippler, 2009; Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Solimano, 2008; Florida, 2005; Robertson, 2006). Prior studies

(e.g. Dickmann and Mills, 2010; Dickmann and Cerdin, 2014) find that a range of location-specific factors such as the quality of social interactions and work opportunities draw professionals to specific cities, such as London. Solimano (2008) further suggests that location-specific reasons for relocating abroad include: better earning and development opportunities; non-pecuniary motivations; a higher demand for capital and talent in the host destination; advanced technology in the host location requiring individuals with specialized training and knowledge; the desire to work in locations with a business or industry cluster (i.e. Silicon Valley); and favorable policy regimes and immigration policies of the host destination.

The aim of this paper is to empirically assess the validity and preponderance of these factors concerning why some countries are more effective at attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals than others. It uses data from a number of secondary sources to examine the extent to which specific economic, social, and institutional factors matter for successfully attracting highly skilled mobile professionals to a particular country and inducing them to remain living and working there. We contribute to the literature on international talent flows (e.g. Carr *et al.*, 2005; Robertson, 2006; De Cieri *et al.*, 2009) by conceptualizing nation branding as a framework through which a variety of push and pull factors can be examined to entice and attract internationally mobile skilled professionals to a particular host-country (Baruch, 1995). The findings of this study will apply to several different types of skilled professionals including SIEs (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Andresen *et al.*, 2014), self-initiated corporate expatriates (or SICEs, who volunteer to relocate abroad with their existing employer; Altman and Baruch, 2012), and third country nationals (TCNs) and local foreign hires (LFHs, executives, and specialists hired directly by MNCs to work abroad; McNulty and Vance, 2015). Evidently, a better understanding of what internationally mobile skilled professionals are seeking is only a first step in attracting them to particular locations, but many marketing campaigns have stumbled even on this first step (Favell *et al.*, 2006, 2007; Silvanto and Ryan, 2014; Solimano, 2008).

### **Nation branding for attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals**

The aim of place or nation branding is to provide countries with a framework for expressing their core strengths and values in a concise and effective manner (Anholt, 1998, 2002). The practice of engaging in nation branding and advertising activities to attract skilled labor is not new. In late-nineteenth century America, for example, the Northern Pacific Railroad advertised Duluth, Minnesota, as a city adorned with orange groves and orchards in order to attract skilled European farmers (Chernow, 2001). Its goal was to entice farmers away from other prospective emigrant destinations, including Argentina and Canada. As in the past, nation branding continues to be predicated upon the belief that countries are engaged in a competition for scarce resources that includes tourists, skilled migrants, investment, and trade (Papadopoulos, 2004). Kaneva (2011, p. 120) finds that nation branding is generally used for what she describes as “technical-economic” purposes aimed at encouraging “economic growth, efficiency and capital accumulation” and as “a strategic tool for enhancing a nation’s competitive advantage in a global marketplace.” The World Economic Forum (2011) asserts that nations will need to develop effective branding strategies for attracting talent from abroad for the purpose of enhancing their economic competitiveness and growth.

De Chernatony (1999) contends that strong and effective “place” brands must be based on a clear vision. In the context of talent mobility, the vision for the brand must

reflect an understanding of the challenges, intricacies, and motivations of relocating across national boundaries (Favell *et al.*, 2006, 2007; Silvanto and Ryan, 2014). Prior research suggests, for example, that the highly skilled leave their home countries for a combination of personal, professional, financial, and even political reasons (Solimano, 2010; Mahroum, 2000; Carr *et al.*, 2005). More recent studies (e.g. Braun and Recchi, 2009, Florida, 2005) show that specific factors, such as living conditions and political stability, also influence which countries skilled professionals are attracted to as places to live and work. Furthermore, studies in international migration (e.g. OECD, 2005; Solimano, 2008, 2010) highlight that the international mobility of tertiary educated people is higher than those with non-tertiary qualifications. Thus, strategies aimed at attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals need to holistically integrate concerns and issues, both practical and symbolic, into the vision that underpins the nation's brand (Silvanto and Ryan, 2014; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003).

A fundamental challenge in nation branding is the multiplicity of stakeholders engaged in the process. As Pride (2001) notes, creating a nation brand is heavily influenced by politics and the need to reconcile the diverging interests of a variety of public and private stakeholders that includes citizens, industry, and professional bodies, politicians, and economic planners (see, e.g. Legget, 2007, 2013). This is especially true in the highly controversial debates surrounding skilled immigration and foreign talent in particular countries (see Abella, 2006; Robertson, 2006). In Singapore and Ireland, for example, a public debate has raged for over a decade concerning the costs and benefits of the influx of overseas-born citizens and non-resident expatriates migrating to their shores over recent years (see Jieyi and Foo, 2013; Yeoh and Lin, 2013; Barrett *et al.*, 2002). Similar controversies have occurred in the UK (e.g. Findlay, 2006), Australia (e.g. Hugo, 2006) and the USA (Borjas, 1999; Martin, 2006).

Nowhere is the debate more pronounced, however, than in New Zealand (NZ) where, despite its long history of immigration (Inkson *et al.*, 2004) and its favorable record of cultural diversity and inclusiveness (see Society for Human Resource Management, 2013; Martin Prosperity Institute, 2011; and UNDP, 2013 for specific ratings), its capacity to attract and retain foreign talent lags well behind other OECD countries such as Sweden and the US (OECD, 2013; World Economic Forum, 2013). The Manpower Group (2013), for instance, found that a staggering 63 per cent of NZ employers associate a reduced ability to serve client needs with talent shortages. Yet, it could be argued that if NZ's "story" were better known and more compellingly told, the ability to attract internationally mobile skilled professionals as a way of maintaining and enhancing the competitiveness of its national economy could increase (Wadhwa *et al.*, 2008).

Morgan *et al.* (2002, 2003) note that some locations pose unique branding challenges because of a combination of too many stakeholders, limited management control and under-developed "place" identities. In Pride's (2001) terms, the special challenges of nation branding are "paucity and politics" where paucity (the absence of a clear identity and vision around which to build a brand) complicates and confounds the politics inherent in constructing a consensus among stakeholders on how the brand should be defined and strategically positioned. Balakrishnan (2009) and Ng (2013) consider that it is the role of national governments to ensure sufficient buy-in and consensus among a multitude of stakeholders who are likely to be involved in national-level branding campaigns. Misaligned expectations and poorly co-ordinated efforts are likely to result in a failure to attract the desired categories and numbers of skilled professionals. Thus, understanding the relative importance of "vision drivers" (i.e. key issues) for attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals is critical, particularly in

professions where many countries face shortages, such as in healthcare, finance, the legal sector, and education (Florida, 2002; Balakrishnan, 2009; Ryan and Silvanto, 2014). Silvanto and Ryan (2014) propose a framework of five strategic vision drivers for branding campaigns aimed at attracting talent, including: employment, economic dynamism and opportunity; cultural diversity and inclusiveness; clear immigration policies and effective governance; geographic concentration of talent; and quality of life, lifestyle, and services. Importantly, successful branding campaigns need to foresee and address the range of motivations and aspirations that either facilitate or deter internationally mobile skilled professionals from accepting positions abroad or from moving abroad in search of opportunities as SIEs, SICEs, or TCNs and LFHs.

### Origins and development of hypotheses

To develop our hypotheses, we examine the literature on internationally mobile skilled professionals and the role that Silvanto and Ryan's (2014) five vision drivers play in influencing international relocation decisions. Silvanto and Ryan's (2014) framework is theoretically predicated on Lievens and Highhouse's (2003) observation that attracting skilled professionals requires instrumental, practical, and symbolic attributes.

#### *Employment, economic dynamism and opportunity*

Silvanto and Ryan (2014) assert that employment, economic dynamism and opportunity are essential for attracting talent. In this study, we focus on employment as the key measure given the difficulty in operationalizing the full construct. This approach is consistent with the large body of literature in economics that examines the availability of employment and wage differentials as major drivers of international labor movements – especially among the highly skilled (Solimano, 2008). Prior studies on international talent mobility suggest that economic themes, such as high salaries and rewarding employment, are essential for attracting talent. The traditional assumption is that highly skilled professionals relocating abroad do so because they are primarily motivated by economic factors, particularly financial disparities and wage differentials (Carr *et al.*, 2005; Solimano, 2008), with career advancement as a secondary motive (Stahl *et al.*, 2002; Creehan, 2001; D'Costa, 2008; Djalal, 2001). Solimano (2008) emphasizes financial incentives and the ability to earn a higher wage abroad as the primary driver of the international mobility of highly skilled professionals. Skilled Indian IT specialists have been found, for instance, to relocate to the US for higher wages and standards of living (Creehan, 2001; Carr *et al.*, 2005). Mahroum (2000) observes, based on an analysis of labor inflows and outflows in the UK, that engineers are 'pulled' and "pushed" primarily by economic factors such as wages. It is important to note, however, that the economic determinants of mobility across national borders can vary according to profession (ESCP Europe, 2010), where, for instance, software engineers from around the world may be attracted to Silicon Valley in California for the opportunity to work in well-funded startups that give stock options to all employees. We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

*H1.* The availability of remunerative employment is positively related to talent attraction.

#### *Cultural diversity and inclusiveness*

Diversity and inclusiveness are being increasingly recognized as essential determinants of skilled professional mobility (Solimano, 2010). Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) observe that relocation to a new country by highly skilled professionals, whether

on a temporary or permanent basis, can result in the individual feeling isolated and marginalized. Maynard *et al.* (2010) further observe that successful inclusion into a new society requires a degree of commitment by the host-country to being welcoming of foreigners. In Singapore, for example, a recent debate has erupted resulting in a “negotiated power struggle” between the Singapore government and its citizens stemming from the influx of skilled foreigners since 2005 (McNulty, 2015). Thus, while many countries such as Ireland, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong depend on MNCs to sustain their economic growth through the use of skilled foreign labor (Benson and Zhu, 2013; Legget, 2013; Xueying, 2013), the fallout from a reliance on skilled foreign talent can be costly socially and economically (Chuan, 2013; Cooper, 2013). Furthermore, foreign professionals are often aware of the tensions that their presence can arouse abroad and may actively seek to avoid relocating to nations that they view as less accepting (Silvanto and Ryan, 2014). On this basis, we propose the following hypotheses:

*H2. Cultural diversity and inclusiveness are positively related to talent attraction.*

*Clear immigration policies and effective governance*

The literature on talent mobility suggests that political and regulatory factors are important vision drivers (Carr *et al.*, 2005; ESCP Europe, 2010). The World Economic Forum (2011) lists clear immigration policies and effective governance as important elements of nation branding in order to attract talent. In many countries, red tape and overburdened government bureaucracies often create barriers that prevent or delay highly skilled professionals from obtaining work and residency permits in a timely manner (Martin, 2008; Mahroum, 2005). Countries with strict, rigid, and cumbersome immigration policies are therefore at a disadvantage (Martin, 2006), including those that do not issue work permits for accompanying partners (Permits Foundation, 2009). Conversely, countries such as Ireland and the United Arab Emirates have become increasingly appealing destinations owing to their high economic growth rates and clear and transparent immigration policies (Florida, 2005). Additionally, immigration policies do not necessarily need to provide a path to citizenship, as in the United Arab Emirates, but instead to provide the right to work and to own property (Martin, 2008). Martin (2006) observes that countries that grant visas and residency to a high proportion of migrants and expatriates based on their skills and employability, such as Canada and Australia, benefit more economically than countries such as the US that allocate only 10-15 percent of visas in this category. We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

*H3. Clear immigration policies and effective governance are positively related to talent attraction.*

*Geographic concentration of talent*

It has long been recognized that the geographic concentration of talent is beneficial for the economic growth of cities, regions or countries (Murphy *et al.*, 1991). In recent years, there has been increasing attention devoted to the impact of economic clusters (e.g. Gertler and Wolfe, 2006) and ethnic networks (e.g. Saxenian, 2002; Kuznetsov and Sabel, 2006, 2008) on talent mobility and agglomeration. Economic clusters are generally heavily dependent on the presence of centers of innovation (such as research universities) and a knowledge-based and dynamic economy (Porter, 2000; Finegold, 1999). As Finegold (1999, p. 67) notes, “the synergistic relationship between these leading research universities and the surrounding firms that hire their graduates and support their research can become self-sustaining as the two act together as a

magnet to pull in the brightest students and professionals from around the globe.” He cites Silicon Valley as the best example of this phenomenon. Clustering, in turn, often encourages a higher concentration of talent in one location (usually a city or region) due to the presence of a key industry or economic activity, e.g., IT in Silicon Valley in California, and aviation in Toulouse and Seattle. Entrepreneurs and engineers from countries as diverse as India and Russia converge, for instance, in Silicon Valley to work in the high technology sector, while the local economy relies on Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley to attract promising graduates.

Ethnic ties also play an important role by providing informal networks for attracting talent from countries with a large number of university graduates, such as India (Saxenian, 2002). Carr *et al.* (2005) note that migrants often prefer to relocate to culturally similar countries (e.g. Australians to the UK, Spanish to Latin America). Overseas networks and expatriate communities based on nationality, ethnicity, and religion often become magnets or facilitators for the further migration and movement of members of the same community (Cohen, 1977; Light, 1984). On this basis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H4.* The geographic concentration or clustering of talent is positively related to talent attraction.

*H5.* Immigrant and ethnic networks are positively related to talent attraction.

#### *Quality of life, lifestyle, and services*

The intrinsic assets and virtues of a location, such as infrastructure and weather, are also important vision drivers (Shapiro, 2006). A key concern for internationally mobile skilled professionals is therefore the quality of life in host countries. This concern extends from a combination of the cultural effervescence of a country, region, or city to healthcare and education (World Economic Forum, 2011; Florida, 2002, 2005). The American Chamber of Commerce in China, for example, found that 36 percent of 244 China-based companies had difficulties recruiting expatriates because of air quality issues, representing a 17 percent increase since 2010 (Ng, 2013). In Hong Kong, some expatriates are considering leaving the city for similar reasons (Hyslop, 2012). By contrast, Hutchings *et al.* (2011) found that when organizations respond effectively to the political and legislative context of an economically significant sector (in their case, the mining and resources sector in Australia) in terms of diversity (e.g. female employees) and work-life balance (e.g. for non-standard working hours or fly-in-fly-out), the attraction of highly skilled employees is likely to increase. We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

*H6.* Quality of life is positively related to talent attraction.

#### **Model and methodology**

To test the six hypotheses set forth above, we used bivariate analysis, a multiple linear regression and a relative importance analysis. Six independent variables were used as proxies for testing the six hypotheses derived from Silvanto and Ryan’s (2014) framework. The strategic vision drivers examined in this study, through the use of carefully selected proxies, were: remunerative employment; ethnic diversity; tolerance; good governance; concentration of talent; and quality of life. The data sources and proxies for the independent variables in this study are discussed below.

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*Sample and data sources*

The sample is made up of 81 countries (i.e. all the countries on which comprehensive data were available) listed in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, 2013-2014. These are the countries judged to be the most globalized societies in the world, i.e., those that, inter alia, are most engaged in global trade and investment and that typify the modern economy of the twenty-first century. Data for the independent variables are derived from the following sources:

- (1) Creativity and prosperity: The Global Creativity Index (Martin Prosperity Institute, 2011) which presents data on 82 countries. It ranks countries on the basis of indicators that measure factors key to creativity, such as tolerance and the agglomeration of talent. The Martin Prosperity Institute is a think-tank affiliated with the University of Toronto dedicated to studying the role of sub-national factors – location, place, and city-regions – in global economic prosperity, taking “an integrated view of prosperity, [and] looking beyond traditional economic measures to include the importance of quality of place and the development of people’s creative potential” (p. 1). The report was used for the independent variables *Tolerance* and *Talent Stock* using appropriate rankings. *Tolerance* was used as a proxy for tolerance and acceptance. The proxy for the concentration and clustering of talent was the independent variable, *Talent Stock*.
- (2) The Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 (World Economic Forum, 2013) which tracks data on 148 countries. The report is an annual assessment of national competitiveness. Data in the report are collected from various international organizations and from the World Economic Forum’s annual Executive Opinion Survey which is administered in over 140 countries. This source was used for the dependent variable in the study and data for the independent variable, *Transparency of Government Policy Making*, which is used as a proxy for good governance in this study. The rationale for selecting *Transparency of Government Policy Making* as a proxy for good governance is that transparency makes governments more accountable to the public by ensuring it is easier to identify their policy choices and constraints.
- (3) The Human Development Report (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2013) published since 1990, which presents data on people in 195 countries. This source was used for the independent variables *Life Satisfaction Index*, *Immigrant Stock* and the *Employment to Population Ratio*. *Life Satisfaction Index* was used as a proxy for quality of life. *Immigrant Stock* and the *Employment to Population Ratio* were used, respectively, as proxies for ethnic diversity and remunerative employment. We selected *Immigrant Stock* as a proxy for ethnic diversity because countries with large proportions of immigrants are often ethnically diverse or have well established immigrant communities. The rationale for selecting *Employment to Population Ratio* as a proxy for remunerative employment is that countries with higher levels of employment generally provide more work opportunities for skilled professionals (Hull, 2009). As noted earlier, it is an imperfect proxy measure for Silvanto and Ryan’s (2014) broad construct of Employment, Economic Dynamism and Opportunity, but we reason that high employment levels generally correlate with economic dynamism and GDP growth. For this reason



we focus our proxy measure on remunerative employment. *Immigrant Stock* was selected as a proxy for ethnic diversity because countries with large immigrant populations or a history of immigration – such as the US, Britain and the United Arab Emirates – also tend to have considerable ethnic diversity.

A summary of the independent variables, their sources, and the proxy measures that they represent is presented in Table I.

The dependent variable in this study is *Talent Attraction*. Its source is The Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 (World Economic Forum, 2013). The World Economic Forum collects data for this variable by using its annual Executive Opinion Survey, a survey of seven-point Likert scale items administered each year in over 140 countries to collect valuable information on a broad range of factors that are critical for a country’s competitiveness and sustainable development. The survey focuses primarily on collecting data concerning factors for which data sources are scarce or nonexistent on a global scale.

A key point to note about the dependent variable, *Talent Attraction*, is that it is measured on an ordinal scale. Ordinal scales are generally not acceptable as dependent variables (Hair *et al.*, 2005). In this case, however, its use can be considered appropriate as the dependent variable, *Talent Attraction*, has a normal distribution. To ascertain this, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of the distribution of the dependent variable, *Talent Attraction*, was performed. The results indicated that the null hypothesis of a normal distribution can be accepted, as *Talent Attraction* (with a statistic of 0.082 and a statistical significance of 0.200) does not have a distribution that is significantly different than a standard normal distribution. The variable, therefore, has a sufficiently normal distribution and broad scale to be a dependent variable.

Independent variable	Source	Author	Independent variable used as a proxy measure to test
1 <i>Employment to Population Ratio</i>	Creativity and Prosperity: The Global Creativity Index	The Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto	<i>H1</i> : The availability of remunerative employment is positively related to talent attraction
2 <i>Tolerance</i>	Creativity and Prosperity: The Global Creativity Index	The Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto	<i>H2</i> : Cultural diversity and inclusiveness are positively related to talent attraction
3 <i>Transparency of Government Policy Making</i>	The Global Competitiveness Report	The World Economic Forum	<i>H3</i> : Clear immigration policies and effective governance are positively related to talent attraction
4 <i>Talent Stock</i>	Creativity and Prosperity: The Global Creativity Index	The Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto	<i>H4</i> : The geographic concentration of talent is positively related to talent attraction
5 <i>Immigrant Stock</i>	The Human Development Report	The United Nations Development Programme	<i>H5</i> : Immigrant and ethnic networks are positively related to talent attraction
6 <i>Life Satisfaction Index</i>	The Human Development Report	The United Nations Development Programme	<i>H6</i> : Quality of life is positively related to talent attraction

**Table I.** Summary of independent variables used as proxy measures to test *H1-H6*

## Analysis and results

### *Bivariate analysis*

The first step in the analysis focuses on bivariate relationships. Table II sets out descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for each variable in the study.

As noted in Table II, the first dependent variable, *Talent Attraction*, shown in column 1, correlates significantly with five of the six independent variables: *Transparency of Government Policy Making*, *Tolerance*, *Life Satisfaction Index*, *Employment to Population Ratio* and *Immigrant Stock*. *Talent Attraction* and *Talent Stock* are moderately correlated with a relationship that is statistically significant at the 0.083 level.

It should be noted that the bivariate correlations in Table II have sample sizes that vary from 148 to 81 due to the fact that the four data sources used in this study provide country-level data on a different range of countries. As 81 of the countries were common to all four data sources,  $n = 81$  was used in the multivariate analyses. The bivariate correlations in Table II demonstrate that the dependent and independent variables are all correlated in a statistically significant manner, with one exception

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>1. Talent Attraction</i>							
Pearson correlation							
Sig. (two-tailed)							
<i>n</i>							
<i>2. Transparency of Government Policy Making</i>							
Pearson correlation	0.653**						
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000						
<i>n</i>	148						
<i>3. Tolerance</i>							
Pearson correlation	0.481**	0.441**					
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000					
<i>n</i>	82	82					
<i>4. Talent Stock</i>							
Pearson correlation	-0.192	-0.404**	-0.412**				
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.083	0.000	0.000				
<i>n</i>	82	82	82				
<i>5. Life Satisfaction Index</i>							
Pearson correlation	0.420**	0.410**	0.508**	-0.470**			
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000			
<i>n</i>	138	138	81	81			
<i>6. Employment to Population Ratio</i>							
Pearson correlation	0.229**	-0.034	-0.132	0.351**	-0.116		
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.005	0.681	0.241	0.001	0.175		
<i>n</i>	145	145	81	81	138		
<i>7. Immigrant Stock</i>							
Pearson correlation	0.492**	0.452**	0.258*	-0.420**	0.321**	0.037	
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.019	0.000	0.000	0.655	
<i>n</i>	148	148	82	82	138	145	

**Notes:** \*\*, \*Correlation is significant at the 0.01, 0.05 level (two-tailed), respectively

**Table II.**  
Correlation table of  
dependent and  
independent  
variables

relating to the correlation between *Talent Attraction* and *Talent Stock*. All the independent variables are, therefore, retained for the multivariate analyses using a multiple linear regression.

*Multiple linear regression and relative importance analysis*

A summary of independent variables used in analysis and their sources is presented in Table I. It should be noted that the multiple linear regression and the relative importance analysis consist of a dependent variable and six independent variables (see Table IV). In both cases, the dependent variable is *Talent Attraction* while the independent variables are *Transparency of Government Policy Making*, *Tolerance*, *Talent Stock*, *Life Satisfaction Index*, *Employment to Population Ratio* and *Immigrant Stock*. As Table III indicates, the independent variables in the multiple linear regression were assessed for multicollinearity with the VIFs of all the variables being below 2, which is an acceptable figure. There are 81 observations and six variables in the multiple regression. The ratio of observations to variables is 13:1. According to Hair *et al.* (2005, p. 197), this is an acceptable ratio for a regression analysis.

As indicated in Table III, the multiple regression model with all six predictors produced  $R^2 = 0.683$ ,  $F(6, 74) = 26.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Five of the six independent variables in the model make a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) unique contribution to predicting the dependent variable, *Talent Attraction*. Interestingly, *Transparency of Government Policy Making* and *Employment to Population Ratio* are the strongest predictors of *Talent Attraction*. *Tolerance*, *Life Satisfaction Index* and *Immigrant Stock* were also significant predictors of the dependent variable in the model. The only independent variable that did not predict *Talent Attraction* in a statistically significant manner was *Talent Stock*. The relationship between these two variables was significant at the 0.098 level which suggests a relatively strong but not statistically significant relationship. This indicates that the six independent variables in the model account for 68 percent of the variance in *Talent Attraction* for the 81 countries in the sample.

To ensure that multicollinearity was not distorting the results of the multiple regression analysis, a relative weight analysis was conducted using RWASWeb (Tonidandel and LeBreton, 2011). The results from this analysis are summarized in Table IV. Confidence intervals for the individual relative weights and all corresponding significance tests were based on bootstrapping with 10,000 replications,

Model	Standardized coefficients		Collinearity statistics	
	$\beta$	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		0.008		
<i>Transparency of Government Policy Making</i>	0.382	0.000	0.620	1.612
<i>Tolerance</i>	0.238	0.005	0.642	1.557
<i>Talent Stock</i>	0.150	0.098	0.535	1.869
<i>Life Satisfaction Index</i>	0.259	0.004	0.578	1.730
<i>Employment to Population Ratio</i>	0.316	0.000	0.759	1.318
<i>Immigrant Stock</i>	0.189	0.023	0.650	1.539
Degrees of freedom	80			
Adjusted $R^2$	0.657			
$R^2$	0.683			
<i>F</i> ratio	26.553			
<i>F</i> ratio $p$	0.000			

**Table III.** Multiple linear regression of factors impacting talent attraction

an approach recommended by Tonidandel *et al.* (2009). Bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals were also used because of their superior coverage accuracy (Tonidandel *et al.*, 2009). In all cases, 95 percent confidence intervals were used, corresponding to a significance testing  $\alpha$  level of 0.05. The results indicate that a weighted linear combination of the six independent variables explained slightly over two-thirds of the variance in the *Talent Attraction* criterion ( $R^2 = 0.683$ ). An examination of the relative weights revealed that all six variables explained a statistically significant amount of variance in *Talent Attraction* as none of the 95 percent confidence intervals for the tests of significance contained zero, with the most important variables being *Transparency of Government Policy Making* (RW = 0.19), *Life Satisfaction Index* (RW = 0.13), *Tolerance* (RW = 0.11), *Immigrant Stock* (RW = 0.10) and *Employment to Population Ratio* (RW = 0.12).

The relative weight results differed little from the multiple linear regression analysis. In the relative weight analysis, *Talent Stock* had a small but statistically significant effect on *Talent Attraction*, with an RW = 0.02, accounting for 3.4 percent of the predicted variance in *Talent Attraction*. This result indicates that multicollinearity between the variables in the multiple linear regression is moderately distorting the relationship between *Talent Stock* and *Talent Attraction* in the multiple linear regression. We can, therefore, consider that *Talent Stock* influences *Talent Attraction* by nations in a statistically significant manner, based on the relative importance analysis.

Taken together, the results of the multiple linear regression and the relative importance analysis indicate that all hypotheses outlined above are accepted: *H1-H6* were accepted on the basis of the two multivariate analyses.

## Discussion

Taken together, the accepted hypotheses suggest that internationally mobile skilled professionals generally prefer to relocate to countries that offer a high quality of life, employment opportunities, sound governance, and a spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness, all other things being equal. Countries wishing to attract such talent (e.g. Canada, New Zealand, and Luxembourg) should, accordingly, emphasize these qualities and assets in their nation branding and promotional efforts by representing their countries not only as fair and rewarding places to work, but also as safe, stable, well-managed and satisfying societies in which to live. Overall, the findings suggest that a holistic and comprehensive approach that emphasizes a range of key themes is necessary for devising and implementing successful nation branding campaigns aimed

Criterion = talent attraction ( $R^2 = 0.683$ )

Predictor	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	RW	CI-L	CI-U	RS-RW (%)
1 <i>Transparency of Government Policy Making</i>	0.585	0.382	0.192645	0.108262	0.287259	28.39
2 <i>Immigrant Stock</i>	0.018	0.189	0.103128	0.04315	0.183593	15.20
3 <i>Employment to Population Ratio</i>	0.029	0.316	0.121196	0.053005	0.201426	17.86
4 <i>Life Satisfaction Index</i>	0.228	0.259	0.129869	0.060574	0.217475	19.14
5 <i>Talent Stock</i>	0.007	0.15	0.02296	0.008541	0.030642	3.39
6 <i>Tolerance</i>	0.011	0.238	0.108697	0.042553	0.189884	16.02

**Table IV.**  
Results of relative  
importance analysis

at attracting talent from abroad. These themes include emphasizing an acceptance of diversity, an appreciation for professional expertise, strong industries, employment, high wages, good governance, and a high quality of life. Furthermore, the study supports Lievens and Highhouse's (2003) assertion that, just as companies with brand images emphasizing their instrumental and symbolic attributes are more successful at attracting talented recruits than those that do not, the same approach also applies to nation branding. In other words, countries that are able to promote key functional and symbolic virtues, such as good governance and a good quality of life, are more successful at attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals than others.

Somewhat surprisingly, our findings show that the agglomeration of talent (i.e. *H4*) only moderately influences the attraction of talented professionals to a country. As noted earlier, the relationship between *Talent Stock* and the dependent variable, *Talent Attraction*, is significant at the 0.098 level in the regression, but not at the 0.05 level. This indicates that *Talent Stock* only accounts for 3.4 percent of the predicted variance in *Talent Attraction* and that, while it does exert some influence on *Talent Attraction*, it is less important than other considerations. This would suggest that mobile skilled professionals do not necessarily insist on moving to countries where there is already a critical mass or concentration of other professions because of the increased competition for jobs, despite that economists and planners view the agglomeration of talent-rich hubs as desirable for sparking innovation and productivity. This finding will, of course, vary according to the profession and/or industry in question. In software development, for instance, it may be more desirable for an entrepreneurial-minded software engineer to live in, or close to, an area with a concentration of software firms and other skilled engineers because it will potentially offer more employment and/or business opportunities.

By contrast, ethnic networks seem to matter more for attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals. While agglomeration has an essential economic motivation, ethnic networks emphasize social and cultural dimensions. In other words, ethnic networks provide the possibility of speaking one's native language, practicing one's religion, finding ingredients for one's native cuisine, and enjoying, for a time at least, a familiar cultural buffer zone in which to adapt to a new life and way of living abroad. This finding, therefore, suggests that the openness of locations to ethnic diversity and tolerance is more important for attracting talent than having a concentration of skilled professionals in that location.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is that it examines a broad cross section of 81 countries, using strong secondary data to overcome problems of common method bias, to identify key features that distinguish countries that are successful at attracting talent from others – noting of course that countries have diverse talent landscapes and needs. In simple terms, the findings highlight important commonalities as to what internationally mobile skilled professionals seek when considering a move abroad, taking into account the increasingly demanding global market in which they live and work. These include high wages, a good quality of life, an acceptance of other cultures, effective public management, industries requiring skilled professionals, and policies that make it easy for foreigners to obtain work permits. Thus, the results of this study suggest that nation branding and the strategic vision drivers proposed by Silvanto and Ryan (2014) are relevant to attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals. Their model indicates that branding and promotional campaigns should seek to address a relatively limited, but essential, number of common issues, such as high wages, employment opportunities and

laws that allow skilled foreign professionals to obtain work permits. But how, exactly, Silvano and Ryan (2014)'s vision drivers are operationalized will, of course, vary considerably from country to country given that nation branding campaigns are likely to confront realities and constraints, and to build and develop national "stories," in different ways and to different degrees. Moreover, promoting the inflow of foreign talent is often an inherently controversial and divisive issue (see Jieyi and Foo, 2013). Thus, while there are advocates for restrictive policies and discriminatory attitudes just as there are for more open policies and more tolerant attitudes (see National Population and Talent Division, 2013; Ng, 2011), for the time-being such restrictions and limitations have to be acknowledged as "givens" within which policy-makers and nation branders must work, as best they can.

A further contribution is that the background against which this study has relevance is the emergence and growth of a genuine, if still imperfect, international labor market for skilled professionals resulting from a global convergence in management systems and production technologies (see McNulty and Vance, 2014). It is here, essentially, that the source of the demand for employees – especially technical and managerial specialists – exists, particularly for those with skills, experience, and credentials that are defined by international standards and which are highly sought after.

### *Practical implications*

The results of this study suggest that "pull" factors such as quality of life, employment, good governance and tolerance and acceptance need to be part of a successful branding campaign aimed at attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals. These individuals are likely to be receptive to messages that inform and reassure them about the challenges and rewards of living in a new country. Nation branding campaigns aimed at attracting talent therefore need to incorporate a number of important vision drivers (Silvano and Ryan, 2014) and to communicate information that minimizes risks and increases trust (Anholt, 1998, 2002; Balakrishnan, 2009), of which the essence is to pledge a unique and welcoming experience in the host country (de Chernatony, 2008).

The findings of this study also suggest that branding campaigns aimed at attracting talent need to focus on a few key issues that impact not only the workplace but also society as a whole. Nation branding is a holistic and complex undertaking that requires commitment and active involvement from a broad and diverse array of stakeholders. These partners need to acknowledge that attracting talent is not only a question of wages and working conditions, but poses a much broader societal challenge requiring action by many groups and entities in different areas and at different levels (see Chuan, 2013). Nation branding to attract internationally mobile skilled professionals would therefore benefit from a nationally co-ordinated organization to support its efforts, much like the field of tourism, for example, is generally managed by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs; Pride, 2001). This task can best be performed by a government agency or organization with a government-approved mandate to manage a nation branding campaign aimed at attracting talent from abroad (see Contact Singapore, 2010). This necessitates that the coordinating organization works closely with companies, organizations and industry trade groups to ensure that the right type of foreign talent is being targeted (Silvano and Ryan, 2014). This organization would, moreover, also act as an advocate and spokesman for explaining why it is important for a nation or economy to bring skilled professionals from abroad.

### Limitations

It must be acknowledged that the model this study is based on – with six hypotheses – may not account for all the reasons that countries are potentially successful at attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals, who may be drawn to specific countries for reasons that are not included in the model, such as entrepreneurial opportunities or a sense of cultural affinity with the host country. Thus, reasons why some countries may appeal to some internationally mobile skilled professionals more than others can sometimes be subjective and personal. The findings of this study could therefore be enhanced by in-depth interviews with, for example, assigned and SIEs as to why they choose particular countries to live and work in (see Andresen *et al.*, 2014). It should also be noted that, given the methodology we have used, the findings of this study are quite general noting that countries vary considerably in terms of the opportunities and living conditions they offer. There may be highly specific reasons why one country is successful at attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals in a specific area or industry at the expense of others. For instance, a country with a relatively affluent but aging population, such as Germany or Italy, may be more appealing to healthcare professionals as a place to work than a country with an equally affluent but younger population, such as France.

### Conclusion

Nation branding campaigns are designed to project a favorable image of a country relative to attracting a specific type of “talent” in the form of expatriates, em/migrants and other skilled professionals. In this study, our findings provide insight into the “macro” factors that draw internationally mobile skilled professionals to some countries over others. The contribution of this study is that it allows a more objective comparison of these factors across a broad array of country attraction factors based on variables that the literature suggests matter to this cohort of professionals. Future studies would ideally seek to confirm or further test our findings by using the same or alternative research methodologies to identify other economic, social and institutional factors that might matter for attracting internationally mobile skilled professionals.

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