

As improved communications and transportation erode the walls that once defined national labor markets, countries around the world are competing not just to attract needed workers, but also choose migrants likely to integrate successfully. Canada and Australia try to select for integration, using point systems to choose migrants likely to do well economically and make good citizens. But after several decades of trial and error, the results are mixed: a system such as Canada's designed to assess "human capital" is a poor tool for predicting professional and economic success. In recent years, Canada, Australia and the United States have been moving toward an alternate approach: giving short-term visa holders who have already had some success, whether at university or in the workplace, the option of settling permanently. A further refinement of this approach would use a point system to assess short-term visa holders after some years in the country, assessing not just attributes like skill and education, but also accomplishments—career advancement and rootedness. Instead of trying to anticipate which migrants are likely to integrate successfully—an all but impossible task—the new scale would measure outcomes and reward them, allowing migrants who are already succeeding to take up permanent residence.

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Selecting For Integration— What Role For A Point System?

By *Tamar Jacoby**

In the twenty-first century, as in the past, the richest and most powerful nations of the world are engaged in an avid competition for resources—a competition that will establish the global pecking order for the next generation. Nineteenth-century powers fought for territory and natural resources: coal, iron ore, precious metals and colonies around the globe. Today, the competition is for talent: the scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and high-end business managers who fuel the dynamism of our era's increasingly-integrated international economy.

The internet, the cell phone, cheap air travel and easy money transfers are shrinking the planet for rich and poor alike. Workers at all skill levels—from manual laborers to corporate executives—can learn about job openings and labor scarcities a continent away. More and more people, in developed and less-developed countries alike, are willing to move to where they can work most productively. According to the global staffing firm Manpower Inc. more than 190 million people—roughly one in every 35—now live outside their countries of origin.¹ And that number is growing daily as improved communications and transportation erode the walls that once defined national labor markets. The challenge for competing destination countries: how to attract and retain this talent—not just knowledge workers, but also less-skilled manpower.

A Double-Barreled Challenge

The contest is most intense at the top of the jobs ladder. Cascading advances in information and communication technology are rippling through the international economy and transforming businesses in every sector. The most talked-about manpower needs are in the cutting-edge clusters known in Germany as MINT professions (mathematics, informatics, natural sciences and technology) and in the United States as the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and medicine). But traditional businesses too—manufacturers, financial institutions, distribution and marketing companies—place more premium than ever on technological advances. Both capital and talent are chasing innovation, halfway around the globe if necessary. One recent survey, of large companies traditionally thought of as American, found that only one in three describe themselves as U.S. companies doing business primarily in the United States. Another third identify as U.S. companies doing business both in the United States and globally. And a full third see themselves as global companies whose headquarters happen to be in the United States.² In other words, not just knowledge workers, but also the firms that employ them, are increasingly willing to relocate to take advantage of creative ferment. Countries that wish to remain competitive must create a climate where

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innovation thrives, including where the innovators of the future want to work and settle.

Most developed countries also need to attract and retain less-skilled workers. Birth rates are falling across the industrialized world. In many countries, including Germany, the size of the workforce is not just leveling off, but shrinking. The average German woman now gives birth to 1.38 children in her lifetime, and according to one estimate, Germany's population could contract from 82 million today to just 65 million by 2060.³ In other developed countries, including the United States, a higher-educated workforce is creating demand for lower-end workers. In 1960, half of the native-born men participating in the U.S. workforce had dropped out of high school and were performing unskilled work; today that figure stands at less than 10 percent.⁴ Yet countries like the United States and Germany still need less-skilled manpower to grow their food supply, care for their elderly and staff the ever-proliferating service sector that supports the middle class.

All developed nations are grappling with similar worker shortfalls, and what all are discovering is that it's a double-barreled challenge—a matter not just of attracting but also integrating significant numbers of new workers. True, not everyone who moves to take a job moves permanently today. Temporary worker programs, international transfers, circular migration and transnationalism, both short- and longer-term, are changing the way people around the globe live and work, creating new options for those willing and able to remain on the move. Still, for most people and most nations, the integration imperative remains as strong as ever. Destination countries can't sustain large-scale immigration that isn't accompanied by integration—if nothing else, most publics won't accept it politically. And ultimately, most workers, skilled or unskilled, want to settle in one country or another, putting down roots and investing in the future.

How can countries connect immigration to integration? How can they make sure one leads to the other on a clearly charted course and that as few newcomers as possible fall off the beaten path? This is among the most pressing challenges of the global era, one that calls for shrewd choices and significant adjustments across society, from the classroom to the workplace. In some cases, the question cuts to the core of the destination country's very identity—its conception of itself as a nation. And the all-important first step is the immigrant admission process: attracting and selecting newcomers who are likely to integrate successfully, not just meeting the country's workforce needs, but ultimately

making good citizens who will participate fully in the social and political life of their new nation.

Picking Winners—Not As Easy As It Sounds

The idea of selecting immigrants on the basis of their potential for integration is not new, and in the past, policymakers seeking to do so often proposed to measure would-be newcomers with a point system.

The Independent Commission on Immigration to Germany, convened in 2000 under the leadership of former Bundestag president Rita Süßmuth, made a point system designed to “structure” immigration and integration as “one unit”⁵ the centerpiece of the commission's far-seeing proposal for an overhaul of the German immigration system. The commission understood earlier than many that the developed world was in a race for talent. The central thrust of its final report was the urgency for Germany of recruiting a highly-skilled workforce. The point system it envisioned would have rewarded formal qualifications and matched vocational preparation with anticipated job openings. But the group warned sharply against selecting migrants on the basis of economics alone. And its report also proposed assigning points for would-be newcomers’ “integration capacity,” their “adaptability,” even their “willingness” to integrate.⁶ “We deliberately looked beyond narrow professional skills to broader criteria,” one commission member later recalled. “The goal was to select a certain kind of person—people with a will to improve themselves, who would integrate easily and contribute to society in diverse ways.”⁷ What no one on the commission appears to have asked is whether a government bureaucracy—or anyone else, for that matter—is capable of determining in advance just which immigrants would be able to integrate successfully.

The Süßmuth point system was never put to the test. Although it was the heart of the commission's proposal, it wasn't included in the groundbreaking German Immigration Law enacted after much debate in 2004. But just a year after the appearance of the Süßmuth report, Canada implemented a new point system designed to assess migrants' educational attainment and personal qualities—what Canadian policymakers call “human capital”—in hopes that this would facilitate integration. The new Canadian plan, which built on more than twenty years of experience with a point-based approach, represented the culmination of the human-capital model. The new plan downgraded the importance of economic criteria rewarded by the country's earlier point systems and all but eliminated consideration of national labor-

market needs. In the new system, points were allocated on the basis of linguistic ability, education and “adaptability,” among other personal attributes. Human-capital factors like education and language comprised close to half of the possible points an individual could earn, while a job offer in the country accounted for only 10 percent.⁸ In Canada as in Germany, the conceit was that the government could pick winners—not just workers who would meet national labor needs and drive future economic development, but a certain kind of person—likely to integrate successfully and, eventually, become a good Canadian citizen.

In the years since it was introduced, the Canadian point system has become a lodestar in international discussions of immigration—a model and an inspiration for policymakers around the world seeking to recruit high-skilled migrants for the sake of national competitiveness. But in fact, the Canadian system is far from an unqualified success. More than half the nation’s immigrants are now admitted under the point system, and they are indeed more educated than the native-born, raising the educational profile of the nation as a whole. Several of Canada’s major cities are or will soon be “majority minority,” meaning more residents will have foreign backgrounds than traditional Canadian roots. And this transition from homogeneous to multicultural society has been remarkably smooth—antagonism is the exception, social peace the all but unbroken rule. What hasn’t worked so well for many newcomers is successful economic and professional integration.⁹

Evidence of failed economic integration was anecdotal at first: random but widespread stories about skilled newcomers who had not found work commensurate with their qualifications. Then, in the past decade, harder evidence began to emerge. Despite strong economic and employment growth in the decades since the point system was introduced, new studies showed that immigrant earnings declined in this period. Specifically, between 1980 and 2000, the earnings of foreign-born men fell by 13 percent, while the earnings of native-born Canadian men grew by 10 percent.¹⁰ Newcomers’ earnings were also more volatile than those of the native-born, presumably because they were moving frequently from unsatisfactory job to unsatisfactory job.¹¹ And according to one province’s tally, after a decade in Canada, even skilled immigrants were more dependent than when they first arrived on the country’s generous welfare system.¹²

By 2004, 45 percent of all new immigrants to Canada had university degrees.¹³ But their frustration in the labor market was so commonplace that it had given rise to an international cliché: the

doctor who hadn’t managed to find a job practicing medicine, so ended up driving a taxi instead. “Brain waste” was the term invented to describe his plight. And in 2007, growing voter concern about the problem drove Canadian authorities to make dramatic changes in the point system, moving away from the human-capital model to a new approach called the “Canadian Experience Class.” The new system awards fewer points for formal qualifications like education and language and takes more account of contextual factors—both local labor-market demand and the prospective immigrant’s experience in the country, including Canadian schooling and prior work experience in Canada. In other words, Canada is moving away from the idea that it can predict integration capacity or pick people likely to make successful citizens and is now trying, somewhat more humbly, to identify those who have already had some success in Canada.

The shortcomings of a Canadian-style point system came into relief again in 2007, when U.S. lawmakers working to overhaul the U.S. immigration system proposed what they called “merit-based” admissions modeled on the Canadian approach. Republican Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona and his allies in the Bush administration were mindful of the galloping race for global talent and eager to respond to employers, particularly in the STEM fields, who were clamoring for easier access to labor migrants, especially highly-skilled knowledge workers. The proposal Kyl and the White House put forward called for a cutback in family-based migration to make room for expanded employment-based flows. It significantly increased the number of visas, temporary and permanent, available for highly-skilled workers and made it much easier for qualified graduate students studying in the United States to stay and work after they received their degrees. Business could hardly ask for more, the reformers thought—until their phones started ringing off the hook and emails poured in from employers writing to express their anger about the proposed point system. IT giants Microsoft and Intel were among the loudest and most insistent.¹⁴

Kyl and the White House were baffled. After all, their system awarded points for education (a potential 28 out of 100) and employment in the STEM and IT fields (another potential 28 points). An employer endorsement was worth 6 points, control of the English language a potential total of 15. Most foreign knowledge workers would pass with flying colors, and not surprisingly—the system had been designed for them. What the reformers forgot is that businesses don’t hire generic profiles—they hire workers. And no U.S. employer—especially not those who count on highly-qualified employees—wanted

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to let the government select who would end up on their payroll. As a human resources manager at a nurse staffing company told a researcher, “We’re not going to hire a nurse just because the government says she has enough points.” Paper credentials would tell this employer nothing about a potential hire’s critical thinking, her empathy or her bedside manner.¹⁵ Nor, in nursing and other fields, could a point system measure a candidate’s specifically relevant educational attainment, job experience, ability to work in a team, problem-solving skills, assertiveness, personal style—or any of the other countless qualities that matter to employers. As one influential employers’ group put it in a policy brief, “We do not believe any government agency is capable of accurately determining the attributes needed to fill the many, varied and constantly changing jobs in the U.S. economy.... We strongly oppose using a point system to decide who should be allowed to enter the country, either as employment-based immigrants or as temporary workers.”¹⁶

The Kyl proposal was defeated for many reasons, including but not only opposition by business. And if anything, that opposition has intensified in the years since. IT giants and smaller companies, firms seeking highly-skilled knowledge workers and trainable manual labor alike, U.S. employers continue to speak as one in rejecting immigration management based on a human-capital model. They also mistrust the contextual considerations increasingly popular in Canada. American businesses have no faith in the state’s assessment of which occupations face worker shortages, and even less confidence in official efforts to determine which sectors should be supported for the sake of future economic growth. They want to recruit their own employees directly, whether at home, abroad or upon graduation from American universities. They don’t trust the government to choose the pool from which businesses draw candidates. The only workable policy in their view is market-oriented. They want a demand- rather than supply-driven approach—one that starts with an employer’s decision to sponsor a particular worker for a visa.

Employers have vested interests, and their assessments cannot be the sole determinant of policy. But the vehemence with which U.S. employers oppose a point system is telling and in line with the Canadian experience. Not only is a Canadian-style system unable to predict successful integration, it’s also a poor tool for picking economic winners.

After more than 20 years of trial and error, the lessons seem clear. Workers aren’t widgets. Good citizens aren’t born, they’re made—or they make themselves over time, through myriad

intangible and unpredictable life choices. And on-paper qualifications judged in advance just don’t tell you enough about human beings to predict how well they will do, either on the job or as members of society.

A Better Idea Emerges

Where does this leave governments trying to design immigration policy that leads to successful integration? Do the shortcomings of a Canadian-style point system mean that the Süßmuth commission’s goal of structuring immigration and integration as one “unit” is unrealistic and unattainable? Not necessarily.

Although the United States, Canada and Australia manage immigration very differently, in some regards their policies have been converging in recent decades, and their experiences may hold clues for policymakers in other countries. All three governments have been rethinking a similar set of questions: what is the right mix of temporary and permanent migration? Should nations aim to discourage temporary sojourners from settling permanently—or rather encourage them? In some cases, this is clearly an undesirable development—a temporary-worker program gone wrong with long-lasting consequences for the host country. But the transition from temporary to permanent can also be a stop on the road to successful integration—and surely that is something countries can use to their advantage.

The United States once made an ironclad distinction between temporary and permanent migrants. Traditionally—and the differentiation goes back many decades—those newcomers who wanted to reside permanently in the United States had to declare their intentions before they entered the country, then prove to authorities that they were worthy of permission to settle for the long haul. Those who met this test, formally designated as immigrants, were granted legal permanent residence, or “green cards,” before they set foot on U.S. soil. Others, who fell into the category of “non-immigrants,” had to prove exactly the opposite—not only that they had no intention of staying in the United States, but that the circumstances they were leaving behind in their home countries all but guaranteed they would return eventually to reunite with a wife or reclaim property or otherwise reconnect with their roots. Over the years, an extensive schedule of visa categories evolved: for U.S. residents’ family members, workers of varying skill levels, students, asylum seekers, refugees and others—each tagged with a different letter of the alphabet and each unmistakably temporary or permanent. What authorities were determined to weed out at any cost was what was known as

“dual intent”: migrants coming initially for a short period who actually intended to stay permanently or who might change their minds along the way.

Then in 1990, Congress stumbled—almost unintentionally—on a new idea. Silicon Valley was just emerging as a center of IT innovation. The dot-com boom of the 90s was poised to take off. And when employers in the IT sector lobbied Congress for more employment-based visas to fuel this technological revolution, lawmakers responded with a compromise. The Immigration Act of 1990 expanded the number of permanent visas set aside for foreign workers sponsored by U.S. employers, nearly tripling the total to 140,000 per year, virtually all of them reserved for highly skilled employees. But hesitant to go further—hemmed in by perennial voter opposition to increasing the quota of permanent visas—Congress quietly padded the package with a new hybrid option. Lawmakers abolished a temporary visa category, the H-1, designated for migrants of “distinguished merit or ability” who could prove they had no intention of staying in the United States, and replaced it with the H-1B visa, which allowed explicitly for dual intent. A limited number of highly-skilled migrants, each sponsored individually by a U.S. employer, would now be granted temporary visas they could renew and then extend permanently by applying to “adjust” to permanent status. At the time, no one understood what a big change this was. But it cracked open a door that has been opening wider ever since, initiating one of the most promising developments in immigration policy in recent decades.

The H-1B visa proved to be wildly popular. The original quota of 65,000 visas a year was expanded twice, more than tripling by the end of the decade. (Those limits were subsequently reduced: the current number is 85,000 annually.) Employers and employees alike appreciated the ease and speed with which they could get the new visas—much faster than waiting for a green card. Businesses liked the flexibility. They could now hire many more knowledge workers on an ad-hoc basis but then transition them to the regular payroll if the need arose. Politically, the dot-com boom seemed to more than vindicate the new openness. And every year through the 1990s, significant numbers—between 20 and 50 percent—of eligible H-1B visa holders chose to adjust to permanent status.¹⁷

Admitting workers temporarily, then allowing those who succeed to stay permanently has a number of advantages. It’s a natural rhythm for many migrants. Skilled workers often try a new country first as students, then stay on after their studies for a first job. Those who don’t find a job or don’t do well when they get one often give up and go home. Those who succeed often choose to

stay and, if permitted, settle permanently. The same holds true at the low-skilled end of the economy, at least in the United States. Most uneducated Latin Americans who enter the United States come to work for a while and make money, and most intend to return home. Many do go home after a year or two, carrying both capital and new skills with them. But the more successful—those who have moved up on the job and like the American lifestyle and appreciate American values—often return to the United States for a second work stint and, if they are still doing well, eventually for a third. Few keep coming back to the United States if they are not succeeding. Unlike in Europe, migrants to the United States get virtually no support from the government, and few can afford to stay if they are not working. Yet over time and several winnowing cycles, the best and brightest and most integrated often end up settling permanently.¹⁸

Temporary migration that turns permanent can be a problem, as Germany learned the hard way from the *Gastarbeiter* experience of the 1960s and 70s. But today Germany welcomes hundreds of thousands of short-term workers every year—migrants who fill labor needs, whether seasonal or contract work, appreciate the opportunity and go home on schedule without a glitch.¹⁹ So too in the United States, Canada and many other countries: well-designed temporary worker programs, with effective incentives to return home when the contract expires, work well around the globe. So the question for destination countries is not *can* policy-makers create an interlocking system of temporary, permanent and hybrid migration options. They can. The question for each government is what mix works best—and the answer is not as simple as it first appears. There are arguments for encouraging both temporary and permanent migrants at both ends of the jobs ladder and all skill levels.

Why short-term visas for the highly skilled? Both high- and low-end sectors sometimes need temporary workers—not just agriculture and seasonal hospitality, but also fast-paced IT firms and multinational corporations. As the H-1B experience shows, employers and employees alike can benefit from the flexibility of a temporary visa—and of course, a flexible, adaptable labor force is a desirable asset in any economy. At the top as at the bottom of the skill ladder, not all workers succeed—remember the doctor driving the taxi in Canada. And in an economic downturn, even highly-skilled workers can become superfluous—an argument for temporary rather than permanent visas, at least in some instances.

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The case for permanent visas can also be counterintuitive. Even when highly-skilled temporary workers aren't sure what the future will bring, most want the option of staying permanently in the place where they are relocating. Allowing for adjustment to permanent status makes a country considerably more attractive to global talent. And it isn't hard to see why retaining high-end knowledge workers is a boon for an economy. But why, in a globalized, competitive world, would a nation want to retain less-skilled laborers? Isn't the race for the best and brightest, and those with the greatest labor productivity? Yes—but not exclusively. There are also compelling arguments to make permanent visas available at the low end of the skill ladder.

Lesser-skilled workers too become more productive with time and training. In the U.S. construction industry, it can take two to three years of on-the-job training before a supervisor can trust an employee to operate complex, computerized machinery. Unskilled workers too move up on the job. They become supervisors and foremen and often play a critical role in integrating their less-experienced countrymen into an industrial or postindustrial workplace. As long as workers are employed and advancing on the job, the host country benefits when they settle and marry and pay their full freight in taxes. Certainly, it makes no sense economically to send them home as they become more productive. And it makes no sense for a nation that values integration and social cohesion to prefer a constantly churning class of low-end contract workers.

Today as in the past, the workplace is the crucible of integration. It's where newcomers have most contact with the native-born and most exposure to local ways of doing things. It's also where newcomer and native-born take the measure of and learn to trust each other. Strictly temporary-worker programs foreclose these opportunities and squander the hard-earned benefits of workplace integration. Not all, or even most, unskilled temporary workers have an interest in putting down roots—many prefer to return home at the end of their work stints. But surely it makes no sense to insist they leave if they are starting down the path of successful integration.

It's no accident that the United States, Canada and Australia are moving in the same direction, slowly but surely restructuring their visa programs to give short-timers who do well at school or in the workplace the option of settling permanently. Like Canada, in recent years Australia has moved away from a classic human-capital model. Both countries still use point systems that reward skills and education, but both now place a premium—

with points and in other ways—on in-country schooling and in-country work experience.²⁰ Meanwhile, a number of thinkers in American immigration-policy circles are exploring the same idea from a different angle: why not offer dual intent to lesser-skilled workers as well as the highly skilled?

The new concept in the United States is a “provisional” visa. First proposed by an independent commission sponsored by the Migration Policy Institute, a respected think tank, the idea has now been endorsed by a leading business group in Washington, the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, which represents employers who rely on less-skilled immigrants.²¹ And some American advocates are taking the concept a step further: adding a point system that would kick in when the provisional worker applied to adjust from temporary to permanent status—a point system designed to measure not just personal attributes like skill and education, but also accomplishments while in the United States, including learning the language, moving up on the job and otherwise making progress toward full integration.²²

A Point System To Measure Integration

The concept at the heart of the proposal is simple enough: a trial period—for the newcomer and, in the newcomer's eyes, for the destination country. Most labor migrants, high and low skilled, would enter the country on short-term visas. Life would take its course—some new arrivals would do well and others wouldn't, some would find the lifestyle in the host country appealing and others would be impatient to get home. When a migrant's short-term visa expired, the normal course of action would be to return to his or her country of origin. But those who wanted to stay on would have the option of applying for a permanent visa—and this is where the point system would come into play. In contrast to a Canadian-style system, the new yardstick would measure not just skill and language ability, but also advancement and rootedness. Instead of trying to anticipate which migrants are likely to integrate successfully—an all but impossible task—the new scale would measure outcomes and reward them, allowing migrants who made the grade to take up permanent residence.

The details would vary from country to country. The first challenge: to design a short-term visa program that's workable for employers and employees alike, but also fair to potentially competitive native-born workers. The second challenge is to get the point system right: making sure it measures what it's supposed to measure and selects newcomers who are indeed doing well—those whom the host country finds desirable as citizens.

In the United States, policymakers designing a new visa program should start by dramatically simplifying and streamlining the complex existing visa schedule. Under the new system, many if not most migrants would arrive initially on provisional permits, lasting, say, three years and renewable once. (The very highly skilled and truly short-term seasonal workers should be exempted. The super-skilled should get permanent visas right off the bat, and truly seasonal workers should remain seasonal, coming and going for short work stints without the possibility of staying.) The provisional-visa program would be flexible in size, capable of expanding in good economic times when labor is in short supply, but also retrenching in bad times as demand for labor wanes. A visa would be dependent on a job offer from an employer—allowing businesses to choose their own workers, while minimizing the kind of mismatch that now occurs in Canada and elsewhere when skilled migrants cannot find appropriate jobs. No newcomer should be allowed to displace a native-born worker: businesses would have to prove they had tried to hire domestic workers before turning to the provisional-worker program. Or, better yet, a sponsoring employer could pay a fee—perhaps a small percentage of the workers’ first-year salary—to demonstrate the need for a foreign employee. Wages and working conditions for newcomers would be commensurate with those of similar native-born employees. And after a first year of work, the provisional visa would be “portable”—the visa holder would be permitted to leave the employer who sponsored him or her and look for a new, better job.

The point system would kick in when migrants applied to convert from temporary to permanent status. Workers would get points for a wide variety of good behaviors and steps toward self-improvement and integration. Host-country language ability, whether acquired while on a provisional visa or before, would be the largest single factor in the calculus. Some criteria would be work-related: years on the job, moving up the career ladder, a recommendation from an employer, an employer petition to sponsor the worker for a permanent position, participation in on-the-job training or an industry-sponsored certification or apprenticeship program. Other measures would gauge personal responsibility. Applicants would score points for paying taxes, staying on the right side of the law and supporting themselves and their families without supplementary income from the government. Still other desirable efforts to put down roots—from learning about the host country’s history and civics to buying a home—could also be rewarded. Skills, advanced degrees or employment in a sector with a proven labor shortage would add points to a score. But more education would not always win—skilled migrants too would have to land on their feet in the new country.

Plainly, the thrust for most nations will be designing a system that attracts highly-skilled migrants. Not much is known, by social scientists or policymakers, about what exactly appeals to these sought-after workers—what draws them to choose one destination over another. But a point system to measure integration could be launched with fanfare and advertised internationally as part of national push to recruit global talent. As with a Canadian-style system, criteria and the points they earn could be posted on a well-publicized website so that workers around the world considering a move could gauge their chances in advance and start the process with some confidence of making the grade. Skilled migrants who do not end up holding down a job in their field or commensurate with their educational attainment should not end up earning enough points to adjust to permanent status. But the system could be designed so that those who do are sure to get permanent slots—holding down a high-end knowledge job should be weighted that heavily. So too with foreign students who graduate from host-country universities with advanced degrees in STEM or MINT fields: the degree itself should be weighted heavily enough that it earns them permanent status, perhaps on an expedited schedule.

The devil is in the details, and some pitfalls can be anticipated. Getting the point system right—selecting the criteria and weighting them most effectively—could take years of trial and error (it has in Canada and Australia). The transition from temporary to permanent must not be allowed to become a bottleneck, as it is now for far too many H-1B visa holders in the United States. Quotas for permanent visas might rise and fall, and no short-term worker, no matter how successful, should have an actionable right to stay in the new country. But the application process should be simple and straightforward. The number of permanent visas available each year should not be allowed to fall too far below the number of qualified provisional visa holders who are earning high scores. (The system’s clear benefits for the host country should help make it more politically palatable to increase visa quotas.) And every effort should be made to keep processing times as short as possible. As for provisional workers who do not make the cut, they should be encouraged to return home with a combination of incentives and disincentives, including termination of government benefits from the host country.

One of the primary virtues of the system would be its flexibility. It would build on the natural winnowing process that currently sorts transients from settlers. If anything, the new system would sharpen that distinction, by creating incentives for both circularity and citizenship—for going home when a visa

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expired and for staying to become a fully-integrated member of society. It would respond effectively to labor-market needs while still allowing host governments to regulate immigrant inflows, controlling first provisional visas and then also permanent residence. It would benefit not just the Indian engineer who arrived speaking perfect English (or German), but also the Mexican (or Turkish) dishwasher who worked hard and rose to be the manager of the coffee shop, learning the host-country language at night and saving money to buy a home for his family.

But most important in the long-run would be the pay-off to integration. Governments need no longer face a choice between labor-market migration and integration—between economic imperatives and social cohesion. Instead of guessing about likely behavior, authorities would simply measure and reward it. And over time, the system could only ease voter concerns about migration—delivering a controlled flow plainly in the national interest, then sorting further still for those most likely to succeed over the long haul. Of course, a point system designed to measure and reward new migrants' advancement and rootedness is only one step to creating a system that connects immigration to integration. Still, it's a solid beginning and one with a fair chance of setting a course, both for individual migrants and destination countries.

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