

Comments on paper “The labor market pathways and employment outcomes of information technology workers with H-1B visas”

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This paper used original data to compare the quality of consulting firms to traditional direct-hire employment on professional outcomes, and concluded that careers trajectories starting with a consulting firms are more limiting in the short term with respect to income and legal statuses, and are more precarious in nature. The research situated itself nicely with the large literature of precarious work , institutional stratification and racialization of migrant workers, with a focus of skilled information technology workers with H-1B visas.

The leading questions for the paper are the role of staffing firms, and how it leads to different career outcomes for skilled migrant workers. From the paper, it seems that the concern stems from three aspects: 1). a growing number of H-1B visas have been sponsored by these IT consulting firms (*page 2, paragraph 2; which by the way, would be clearer and more compelling if there are statistics as evidence showing the proportions and growth of consulting firms*); 2) consulting firms do not sponsor their H1-B workers for permanent residence at rates similar to direct hire employers (*page 13, paragraph 2*). 3) the existing research did not fully help us understand the career pathways of H-1B visa holders, which contains both direct hire and working at consulting firms (*page2, paragraph 3*). It would help readers better understand the motivation and potential significance of the study to articulate these upfront in the introduction section, and leave less discussion on the debate about H-1B programs itself (*page1, paragraph 2*).

The paper seems to struggle with two sets of comparisons. One is between direct hire employers and consulting firm employers, and the other is between H-1B holders and other employers. The writing sometimes jumps back and forth between these comparisons in laying out background, setting up questions and explaining the significance of the research. The reasons behind the first comparison are laid out more clearly, as discussed above; perhaps it would be clearer if the writing lays out how both categories affect the comparison between H-1B programs and other types of employment.

The employment outcomes are defined as income, permanent citizenship, precariousness score, the likelihood of ending up with a consulting firms. Is the second job still in consulting firms a measure of stickiness? Why are both consulting firm experiences are independent variables in the ordinary least square regressions to predict other outcomes? How do you measure the short-term and long-term effect of the employment (*page 11, paragraph 2*)? It would help the reader to understand the operationalization of the concepts and the sample by laying out more detailed descriptive statistics on outcomes variables, and career pathways. For instance, in one table, lay out how many people in the sample have first jobs as dire-hire employers, consulting firm employers, other visa holders, currently how many of them continue to stay where they are, and how many transition to different positions. In another table, categorize these career pathways and then display descriptively, their career outcomes. Then again, which part of these career paths the study is interested in needs further consideration, as it might end up being a larger project rather than a paper.

Finally, there are some questions and comments that might be helpful in revising the paper. 1) Why are individuals not residing in the United States currently excluded? Leaving the country can be considered as another important career outcome that might shed light on the research question. Perhaps consulting firms are failing in landing their employers permanent residency, and that is the reason why people are leaving. Excluding this part of the sample might lead to biased results. I recommend reconsider the sample selection, or discuss how the results are affected because of this decision. 2) Explain coefficient decay model in more specifically in the method section. 3) When explaining the results from OLS regression, “association” is a more accurate description than “effects”, especially given the sample size and the limited control for covariates; 4) In all descriptive tables, proportions can be put in the same columns as means if it is a dummy variable, and it would make these tables easier to read.