Conversations about Aboriginal Work Experiences: Reflections for Community Members, Organizations, and the Academy

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ABSTRACT

The authors relate how they reflected upon, understood, and shared conversations about Aboriginal experiences at work across time and with different audiences. They found nuances in their understanding and interpretation as their audience changed from sharing circle members, to Cando conference attendees, and finally the Academy. Whereas initial impressions highlighted concepts of strength and resilience, which the authors translated into practical recommendations for mentorship and cultural safety, the results from an academic analysis highlighted how conversational focus changed when participants discussed work experiences in the past (systemic barriers emphasized), present (Indigenous worldviews emphasized), and future (all concepts discussed equally). The authors offer suggestions for continuing the conversation and new ways of understanding Indigenous employees' experiences at work.

Organizational growth and community health are indicators of economic development that are facilitated through employee well-being, most commonly defined within the Academy as growth and satisfaction at work (Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh, 2016; Newhouse, 2004; Rajaratnam, Sears, Shi, Coberley, & Pope, 2014; Reijseger, Peerers, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2017). Aboriginal worldviews on well-being, growth, and satisfaction that focus less on material gain and more on learning from, connections with, and giving back to the community and land, are distinct from these conceptualizations (Archibald, 2008; Julian, Somerville, & Brant, 2017), as Juntunen and colleagues found in their conversations about careers with Native Americans (Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck, Seibel, Winrow, & Morin, 2001). Thus, management practices rooted in European worldviews and individualistic goals of a capitalist system may be a poor fit for Aboriginal employees. The lived experiences shared in the edited volume *First person, first peoples: Native American college graduates tell their life stories* (Larimore, 1997), provide context for our interest in understanding how Aboriginal employees in Canada experience work. Lori Arviso Alvord, a surgeon who grew up in Crownpoint on the Navajo reservation, attended Dartmouth University, and later completed medical school and a residency at Stanford writes:

> It is as though I am living in two parallel worlds that exist side by side but only rarely intersect. Native American friends who see me in action at the hospital or hear me speaking "medicalese" on the phone often have a hard time integrating that doctor with the woman they know. Surgeons and others I work with rarely see the woman who goes to a medicine man for advice during her pregnancy. My roles are complicated and even I get lost in them sometimes. Yet I have found a unique place in my culture as a role model for young people and as a human cultural "bridge" for Navajo people. (Alvord, 1997, p. 228)

Dr. Alvord's story evokes feelings of discomfort and identity conflict. Bill Bray, a Creek from Oklahoma, also educated at Dartmouth and Stanford, offers a more visceral account of his experience as Executive Director for the Native American Preparatory School.

> I flew across the country from New York to L.A., had meetings at private clubs and on yachts where no one looked like me, and asked people to donate money to Indian education, because Indians are the people of the future. And then I would go home and cleanse myself and vomit, because that is what you do if you are Creek and believe in our traditional ways and find yourself living in a world that is increasingly strange. Then I would return to work and laugh myself through another day, clinging to thirty-five thousand years of dances and stories and philosophy and thought and the comfort, joy, pain, and work that its survival implies. (Bray, 1997, p. 40)

As industrial organizational psychologists trained in the Academy, the first and second authors have observed, interviewed, and surveyed employees from many different national cultures to learn about the impact of national culture on job satisfaction, trust, communication, and conflict at work (e.g., Adair & Brett, 2005; Kwantes, 2010). The third author introduced us to the Aboriginal communities in Canada, whose values are typically more collectivist, egalitarian, family-oriented, and flexible than non-Indigenous peoples' (Redpath & Nielsen, 1997; Juntunen & Cline, 2010, Verbos, Gladstone, & Kennedy, 2011, Stonefish, 2013). We wanted to learn more about Aboriginal worldviews and how they are related to Aboriginal employees' experiences at work in Canada.

We began reading statistics reported by Canadian and Aboriginal sources which agree that employment rates for Aboriginal populations lag well behind the rates for non-

Aboriginals in Canada (Environics, 2010; Mendelson, 2004; Usalcas, 2011; National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, 2015). True to our European epistemology, we saw a problem that we wanted to understand and solve, and so we began by examining previous research on employment success for different social and ethnic groups, for example women versus men, African American vs Caucasian American, and a few limited publications in mainstream academic journals about Aboriginal populations in the U.S. and Canada, mostly in the field of career counselling. We also read literature by Aboriginal authors and first-person accounts of Aboriginal employees in Canada and the United States, (e.g., Alvord, 1997; Bray, 1997). Along with systemic barriers to education and training and prejudice, an issue that seemed to be prominently related to dissatisfaction at work was identity conflict.

Identity conflict is defined as the degree to which one's cultural identity, the sense of who a person is as a cultural being, an aspect of the self that is fundamental to an individual's self-concept and self-esteem (Giddens, 1991; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011), is recognized and validated at work (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). Related to identity conflict, the connection with the working environment was another theme we saw in the literature. Person-organization fit, defined by people's feeling that they (including their culture) fit comfortably within the organization and that the organization's system, structures, and working environment fulfil their needs (Judge, 1994; Kristof, 1996), is another organizational construct we thought might inform our inquiry. We know that in North American and Western European organizations, employees who experience identity conflict and poor fit are likely to have lower job satisfaction and performance as well as higher turnover rates (Kristof, 1996; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Judge, 1994).

Identity is a recognizably complex construct for Aboriginal peoples in Canada and a major focus for contemporary urban Aboriginal scholars (see Peters, 2011 for a review). Native American conversations about careers also allude to moving between two worlds, having to adjust oneself to be effective off the reservation, and needing to reconnect with one's community (Juntunen et al., 2001). Master's thesis research supervised by the first author found that Aboriginal employees in Southwest Ontario who experienced more cultural identity conflict, described by feelings such as "I am conflicted between the Aboriginal and Canadian ways of doing things," also reported greater work exhaustion (Racine, 2016). This relationship, in turn, was mediated by role conflict, defined by Peterson and colleagues (1995) as incongruence in role expectations or incompatibility between role expectations or job requirements. Thus, personal identity conflict can be compounded by role conflict, resulting in the highest level of reported work exhaustion. These findings suggest that Aboriginal employees in non-Aboriginal organizations may experience role conflict when they experience identity threat based on expectations to abandon their primary cultural identity to satisfy role demands. Julien and colleagues (2017) conducted interviews with 56 Aboriginal employees across Canada and concluded: "Thus, it was challenging for them to develop a strong linkage to their culture, and their self-identity. Often their identity had to be subsumed into a persona that "fit" better with what the organization wanted to see" (Julien et al., p. 173).

Based on this prior work, we might hypothesize that identity conflict at work explains lower employment rates for Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal populations in Canada. We then might conduct a survey of Aboriginal full-time employees in a variety of organizational forms to test our hypothesis. But this approach would be using our lens and our ways

of knowing to solve something that we defined as a problem. How accurate are the employment statistics cited above? Do Aboriginal experiences at work influence satisfaction and retention? Would it be helpful for us to facilitate a conversation about these issues? We did not know. Guided by readings on Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008), we refrained from defining research questions and developing hypotheses. We aimed to remove our own biases, begin a conversation, and listen to Aboriginal voices share their experiences, challenges, and questions in the realm of work. As Shawn Wilson notes, "Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers" (p. 6). In this work, we did not presume to know an answer. We did not assume a question.

We took as our guiding principle the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC, 2012) final report and Calls to Action 92: Business and Reconciliation that highlights the importance of meaningful consultation and respectful relationships in understanding workplace issues and ensuring that Aboriginal peoples have "equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities." It is in response to this call that we organized the *Sharing Knowledge~Building Relationships: Aboriginal Experiences in the Cross-Cultural Workplace* conversations (see Kwantes et al., 2017) to stimulate reflection, sharing, and discussion about the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian workplace. JoAnn Archibald recounts in her *Indigenous Storywork* (2008, p. 48) how Chief Leonard George of Tsleil-Waututh First Nation near Vancouver taught that contemporary academics who engage in respectful, reciprocal, and relational research are like hunters in the forest, who gather only what they need, bring it back home, and share it with all who can use it. Thus we invited participants to share their experiences and thoughts about work and now we are sharing them with you.

Following, we describe three versions of how we reflected upon, understood, and disseminated these shared experiences one month, four months, and one year after our conversations at the VIU Cowichan campus. As David Newhouse wrote, re-conceptualizing our understanding of economic development requires thinking through, debating, experimenting, and finding out what works (Newhouse, 2004). In this light, we hope to begin a conversation about Aboriginal experiences at work to think, debate, and invent new ways of understanding management practices and enhancing employee experiences at work.

SHARING WITH THE COMMUNITY OF PARTICIPANTS

Context

Our first audience was the people who attended our meetings in June 2016. All conference participants were informed about, and consented to, our summarizing and sharing the general content of our discussions. As discussed by Kwantes and colleagues (2017), four sharing circles were held, each with a different focus on Aboriginal experiences in the workplace, and discussion notes were taken in each circle. Sharing circle notes did not contain any identifying information nor any direct quotes and were reviewed and approved by all conference attendees for use and dissemination by our team. Each author participated in a sharing circle, and immediately following the gathering we shared notes and reflections in person and over email, having a conversation about our impressions and lessons from the discussions. Based on these discussions, the first author drafted a brief conference summary

to share with participants that included knowledge we wanted to share from the academic field of Industrial-Organizational Psychology (IOP) that speaks to the concepts our participants discussed.

This draft was shared with all team members for additional input. One team member shared and discussed the summary with community members at Vancouver Island University — Cowichan Campus. Once we had feedback from community members, all team members participated in crafting the final document summary, and the third author disseminated it via email to all conference participants. She invited participants to reflect and respond to our own understanding of the discussion themes (we did not receive any responses).

Themes

One major theme that emerged from our initial post-event reflections was the power of resilience among Aboriginal peoples. Sources of resilience identified by participants included a strong cultural identity, spiritual foundation, and pride in heritage. It was noted that some youth fear losing their Aboriginal identity when joining the contemporary urban workforce. All sharing circles discussed balance within the individual, supported by the community and the workplace through authenticity, as another piece of resilience. They also discussed the importance of today's youth learning the history of individuals, families, and nations. Sharing stories about challenge and success in families, schools, communities, and at public events like ours can help build resilience in today's and tomorrow's youth.

The discussion of resilience among Aboriginal peoples reminded us of the IOP concept of social resilience, whose "unique signature is the transformation of adversity into personal, relational, and collective growth through strengthening existing social engagements, and developing new relationships, with creative collective actions" (Cacioppo, Reis, & Zautra, 2011, p. 44). Resilience has been discussed as a process — a positive developmental trajectory characterized by demonstrated competence in the face of, and professional growth after, experiences of, adversity in the workplace (Caza & Milton, 2012). Resilience has been related to positive work outcomes including work happiness, organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Yousseff & Luthans, 2007), and job performance (Meneghel, Borgogni, Miraglia, Salanova, & Martínez, 2016).

Across sharing circles, the topic of Aboriginal youth's self-confidence was discussed. One sharing circle recorded that "youth feel that outside the reserve they are unwanted and undervalued." Several sharing circles touched on the concept of trust. To inspire Aboriginal employee trust in the organization, participants remarked that companies should understand Aboriginal history, culture, and values. A related belief, that companies hire Aboriginal employees as tokens, contributes to low trust and feeling unappreciated. These concepts of self-confidence and trust in the organization are addressed in several areas of IOP.

Another term for self-confidence in IOP is "self-efficacy" — the belief in one's ability to complete a task or succeed in a given situation (Bandura, 1977). One factor related to self-efficacy at work is stereotype threat, a concept social psychologists uncovered when trying to understand why African-American students in the U.S. often performed below their ability level. Stereotype threat explains why minority employees who feel they don't belong or are undervalued at work tend to develop negative self-perceptions consistent with their group stereotypes (e.g., I am not competent to perform in this role) that affect job seeking and job performance (Polzer, Minton, & Swann, 2002; Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Interventions to reduce stereotype threat include positive self-affirmations

and supporting a sense of belonging (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Related to self-efficacy at work is psychological safety, a workplace climate characteristic that exists when employees feel valued and safe to voice their opinions (Edmonson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004). Rewarding relationships between coworkers and supervisors have been shown to increase psychological safety, which in turn increases employee engagement, trust, and learning (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). Beyond organizational initiatives, IOP research suggests that community and interpersonal efforts to activate resilience and promote balance should also help to boost Aboriginal youth self-efficacy at work.

Summary

Based on our initial post-event reflections, we identified themes of resilience and self-efficacy as possible topics for future conversations, research, and training. Participants offered examples of meaningful efforts, including organizational leaders consulting with local elders, demonstrating respect for the culture and the land, and providing cultural leave options.
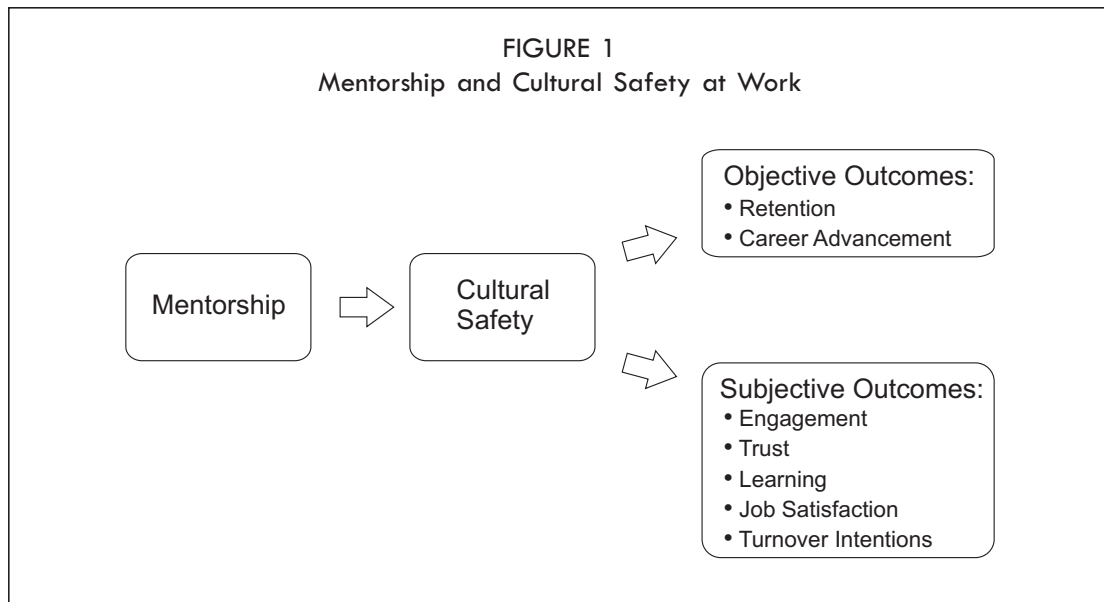
SHARING AT CANDO ANNUAL MEETINGS

Context

In October 2016, we had the opportunity to share our reflections and implications for Aboriginal employment at the 23th annual meetings of the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando) in Whitehorse, Yukon, hosted by dänä Naye Ventures, Kwanlin Dun First Nation, Ta'an Kwach'an Council and Council of Yukon First Nations. Over 300 delegates gathered for three days of panels, addresses, meetings, and shared meals at the Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre.

Our audience members were development officers, business owners, employers, youth, and community members from across Canada. Whereas previously our goals were to convey a sharing circle summary and related concepts from the field of IOP, in this case our goals were to convey the format and content of our discussions with an emphasis on practical applications and ideas for the future. Over approximately four weeks, the research team revisited the sharing circle notes and held conversations about workplace implications until we reached consensus to frame our story around promoting Aboriginal youth employment, work engagement, and career advancement.

Themes

At the Cando meetings, we briefly summarized the format of our event and the sharing circle discussions and then explained how we integrated the concepts into a model of mentorship and cultural safety at work (see Figure 1). We proposed that the main issues discussed in the sharing circles — low self-confidence, low trust, tokenism, and stereotyping — can be addressed by organizations through a culture-based form of psychological safety. As noted above, psychological safety is a workplace climate characteristic based in mutual respect and understanding that increases employee trust and learning (Edmonson et al., 2004). We proposed Cultural Safety, a term used to describe medical provider — Indigenous

FIGURE 1
Mentorship and Cultural Safety at Work

Mentorship → Cultural Safety

→ Objective Outcomes:
• Retention
• Career Advancement

→ Subjective Outcomes:
• Engagement
• Trust
• Learning
• Job Satisfaction
• Turnover Intentions

patient interactions in the field of nursing (*cf* Williams, 1999), could also be a workplace climate characteristic that exists when employees feel their culture is valued and it is safe to express their cultural identity.

Cultural safety requires understanding, supporting, and promoting the integration of Aboriginal culture into organizational ways of knowing and being. Cultural safety is not an organizational policy or ideology like multiculturalism, which is a recognition of equality of all cultures in Canada today (Canadian Multiculturalism Act; http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-18.7/). In contrast, cultural safety requires recognition of the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples within the historical legacy of power relations and colonialism. Similar to the cultural mosaic team climate characteristic (Chuapetcharasopon et al., 2010), workplace cultural safety is a climate in which Aboriginal employees feel their identity may be freely expressed, accepted, and utilized in their work. A positive, safe, and supportive work context has been shown to impact employee resilience and job satisfaction, which in turn impact job performance (Meneghel et al., 2016).

We proposed to our audience that mentorship programs offer one way to create a workplace climate of cultural safety. Mentorship offers less experienced protégés career and psychosocial support from more experienced mentors. Career support includes coaching, sponsorship, and exposure to organizational units and opportunities. Psychosocial support includes modelling appropriate workplace behaviour, offering advice on work issues, and friendship (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Importantly, mentorship has been shown to build self-efficacy in existing organizational research. This occurs through learning from observing the mentor, identification with the mentor, additional access to knowledge and social networks, as well as opportunities to display talent and skills (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Also importantly, mentorship is a reciprocal, mutual opportunity for growth and learning.

Through conversation, relationship building, and reciprocal sharing, mentors and mentees gain a holistic sense of the organizational environment at a given time as well as reasonable short- and long-term reciprocal expectations. Tying the mentorship model to the

stories told at our sharing circles, we proposed that mentorship initiatives should focus on three key areas. First, mentorships should help build cultural knowledge among Aboriginal youth by providing examples of successful Aboriginal careers, either through historical accounts, forging connections, or the mentor's lived experiences. Second, the mentor should recognize and help build resilience through translating Aboriginal history to the contemporary and translating that learning to the contemporary organizational landscape. Third, the relationship should strengthen and affirm the Aboriginal employee's personal and cultural values to interrupt the potential of stereotype threat. Finally, we recommended that supervisors hold responsibility and accountability for implementation and oversight of mentorship programs. Research on mentorship programs in the workplace has found that organizational responsibility through oversight and accountability is essential for the success of such programs, and that these mentorship programs are more effective than management anti-bias training programs (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).

Summary

Following the Cando meetings, we disseminated our PowerPoint presentation along with complete speaker notes to those who had expressed interest. This document was also posted to the Cando conference website (http://www.edo.ca/downloads/promoting-aboriginal-youth-employment.pdf). Our recommendations for formal mentorship programs are supported by Julien and colleagues' recent research on work-life enrichment among Aboriginal peoples. These authors note that Aboriginal employees across Canada reported that supervisor support, access to Elders, formal employee assistance programs and employee resource groups were essential for working towards work-life enrichment (Julien et al., 2017). Such programs, the authors note, are part of Aboriginal peoples' self-determination, their "desire to balance work and family obligations through a different lens where their cultural practices are seen as vital to work-life balance" (Julien et al., 2017, p. 174).

The first author shared our reflections with Jean Becker, Senior Advisor for Aboriginal Initiatives at Wilfrid Laurier University, and Myeengun Henry, Manager of Aboriginal Services at Conestoga College, in Southwest Ontario. Jean is of Innu, Inuit, and English ancestry and a member of the Nunatsiavut Territory of Labrador. The first author shared her prior experience researching workplace communication in national cultures around the world and gave examples of different communication styles leading to misunderstanding and conflict at work. Jean indicated that distinct communication styles are a challenge for many Aboriginal University students seeking employment. They discussed the role of listening and asking questions, the purpose of communication and relationality, and how people address their superiors and view conflict. The first author spoke of mentorship, and Jean Becker also shared the importance of staying in touch with alumni who can share their work experiences with current students.

Reflections were also shared with Lori Campbell, Director of the Waterloo Aboriginal Education Centre at St. Paul's University College. Lori is of Cree/Métis heritage and her ancestral lands are in Treaty 6 Territory in northern Saskatchewan. Lori expressed interest in finding Indigenous alumni of post-secondary institutions in Canada to learn more about how their indigeneity may intersect with communication within their place of work. She also felt it important to invite them back into the circle of learning whereby they could have opportunity to engage in a mentorship relationship with current Indigenous students. Lori spoke about the importance of incorporating Indigenous research perspectives as being fundamen-

tal to moving forward in a meaningful way as engaging with Indigenous participants in a Euro-centric fashion might only provide for the Indigenous experience to be reflected from a translation into a Euro-centric lens.

SHARING WITH THE ACADEMY

Context

Our third look at the sharing circle conversations from our June 2016 meetings took the form of a qualitative analysis that one of the first author's students conducted as an Honours Psychology thesis. Under supervision of the first author, the student received approval for her qualitative analysis and knowledge dissemination by the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board. She then spent three months developing a content code and training two coders (one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal) to reliably classify the anonymous sharing circle notes into content categories. Finally she conducted statistical analyses to examine the frequency with which different concepts and categories were mentioned in the sharing circles to examine whether some concepts were discussed more often than others. Below we present a brief version of the methods and the interpretations (a full account of the methods and results are available by request from the first author).

Methods

We employed a grounded theory approach that allows ideas to emerge from qualitative data guided by a specific theoretical lens (Locke, 2001; Simmons, 2010; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). As with the *Sharing Knowledge~Building Relationships* program format, this research approach begins with broad questions to aid identification of concepts and linkages between theoretical constructs and the data. It is important to note these qualitative methods are rooted in European positivism and not traditional Indigenous epistemologies and holistic worldviews (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Our inductive inquiry was guided by social identity theory, according to which categorization processes place the self within groups of similar others, for example cultures or race (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1982; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An underlying assumption was that sharing circle participants recognized the existence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural identities, which may or may not have impacted their experiences at work.

Using open coding principles (Simmons, 2010), we began with exploratory coding, an unstructured examination of the data to identify and define themes to be coded in stage two (Saldaña, 2015). This inductive qualitative analysis resulted in a content coding scheme consisting of four higher level concepts rooted in IOP and a total of eight sub-categories reflecting Aboriginal experiences at work (see Table 1).

Descriptions of Concepts and Categories

Trust

The concept of trust emerged from repeated references to collaboration and understanding between individuals and within the organization in general. Aboriginal peoples' history

TABLE 1
Code Developed from Inductive Data Inquiry and Used for Content Analysis

CONCEPTS	CATEGORIES
Trust	1. Respectful Collaboration (Interpersonal trust) Example: "Experts/authority can be arrogant and despite good intentions do not collaborate." • Employee can rely on co-workers • Respect in teamwork • Inclusive communication, no stereotyping 2. Organization Respects and Supports Employee's Identity at Work (Trust in one's organization) Example: "Companies don't understand their workers." • Organization protects individual employees' cultural identity • Organization recognizes and appreciates diversity • Tokenism
Values	1. Understanding and Acknowledgement of Balance (Cultural values for balance) Example: "It is important to connect with Elders." • Organization understands importance of work–family balance • Balance between community, education, and employment. 2. Understanding and Acknowledgement of Indigenous Worldviews (Indigenous or non-Indigenous cultural values, other than balance) Example: "How do you align cultural traditions with the employer?" • Organization recognizes Aboriginal values • Respect for holidays and traditional ceremonies • Organizational operations acknowledge and respect Aboriginal values for land
Person–Organization Fit	1. Time Perspectives: Looking Forward-Looking Back (Time perspectives directly influencing employee actions or organization practices.) Example: "Leadership has to bring back traditional ways." • Organization establishes relationships with Elders • Organization recognizes importance giving back to community, work for future generations 2. Cultural Values in the Workplace (Cultural values, other than time perspective, directly related to employee actions or organization practices.) Example: "Mismatch between work expectations can impede goals." • Different time management styles • High vs low context communication • Individual vs group oriented goals and achievement • Different approaches to learning
Barriers	1. Financial/Economic Barriers Example: "Lack of access to transportation, educational experiences." • Access to education and training • Employee assistance programs 2. Identity Stereotypes and Racism Example: "Racism is a huge barrier to employment." • Stereotypes • Discrimination and social exclusion

with colonists makes trust an elusive yet essential element of respectful engagement in social and organizational settings (Herring, Spangaro, Lauw, & McNamara, 2013). Two particular categories emerged from the comments that were related to this concept. The first category contained comments related to interpersonal trust. In the workplace, characteristics of interpersonal trust include integrity, competence, loyalty, consistency, and openness (Schindler & Thomas, 1993). This category within our coding scheme is named Respectful Collaboration (Interpersonal trust). The second category refers to trust in the organization, for example perception that an organization respects and supports an employee's cultural identity. This category was called Organization Respects and Supports Employee's Identity at Work (Trust in one's organization).

Values

The concept of values emerged from sharing circle conversations that addressed Indigenous worldviews in general, without reference to a specific workplace behaviour or organizational policy. Human values are defined as desirable goals that serve as guiding principles in life (Kluckhohn, 1951) and are related to workplace motivation (Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999). We included two categories of values: (1) Understanding and Acknowledgement of Balance and (2) Understanding and Acknowledgement of Indigenous Worldviews. For Indigenous employees, family and community needs come before work needs which can make it difficult to find work-life balance in a non-Indigenous workplace (Brayboy, 2005; Julien et al., 2017). Balance means having time for family, elders, and spirituality without ascribing to non-Indigenous priorities for material gain and career prestige (Brayboy, 2005; Clark, 2001; Julien et al., 2017; Juntun & Cline, 2010). The Balance category was applied to comments about work-life balance whereas the Indigenous Worldviews category was applied for any other value comments (e.g., Indigenous connection to the land) that did not specifically address a workplace behaviour or policy.

Person-Organization Fit

The concept of person–organization fit emerged from conversations about Indigenous worldviews or values that referred to a specific work context, behaviour, or organizational policy. Person–organization fit is defined by a congruence between the values and needs of an employee and their organization (Kristof, 1996) and, at least in part, can be impacted by cultural values and norms (Kwantes, Arbour, & Watanabe, 2012). When an employee's values do not align with organizational values, this lack of congruency can cause identity conflict and dissatisfaction at work (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). Two categories emerged most strongly in the sharing circle discussions: 1) Time Perspectives: Looking Forward-Looking Back and 2) Cultural Values in the Workplace. The category of Time Perspectives was applied to comments about the need for or experiences with the past informing current work or current work contributing to the future. The category of Cultural Values in the Workplace was used for comments about the fit or lack of fit between Indigenous and/or Western attitudes in the workplace, for example clock versus event time or direct versus indirect communication norms.

Barriers

The barriers concept emerged from conversations about systemic or structural hindrances to Aboriginal employment, experiences at work, and/or career advancement. These

practical barriers to opportunities include individual and institutional discrimination, which prevent access to social assistance and other structural foundations (Smye & Browne, 2002). Two categories of barriers were found: Financial/Economic Barriers and Identity Stereotype/ Racism Barriers. The category Financial/Economic Barriers was applied for structural constraints such as lack of transportation, educational experiences, employment centres, and other urban development features. Such barriers can sway people from pursuing employment outside the reserve or force them to move far from their communities for sustainable employment (Juntunen & Cline, 2010; Juntunen et al., 2001). The category Identity Stereotypes/Racism was applied to comments about systematic discrimination against an employee and/or their cultural group. Negative stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples can cause apprehension about entering a workplace and ostracism within the workplace.

Two research assistants, one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal, were trained over two months to interpret comments and assign codes using the same lens. They coded all concepts and categories, (Interrater reliability Cohen's *Kappa* 0.89), and discussed any discrepancies until reaching consensus.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

We first examined the overall number of comments made within each concept throughout the conference (Figure 2). The majority of comments addressed the concept of Trust, followed by Person/Organization fit, Barriers, and lastly Values. As well, an analysis of the frequency of comments per category illustrates that Organization Respects and Supports Employee's Identity at Work, Time Perspectives: Looking Forward Looking Back, and Financial/Economic Barriers were discussed most often (Table 2).
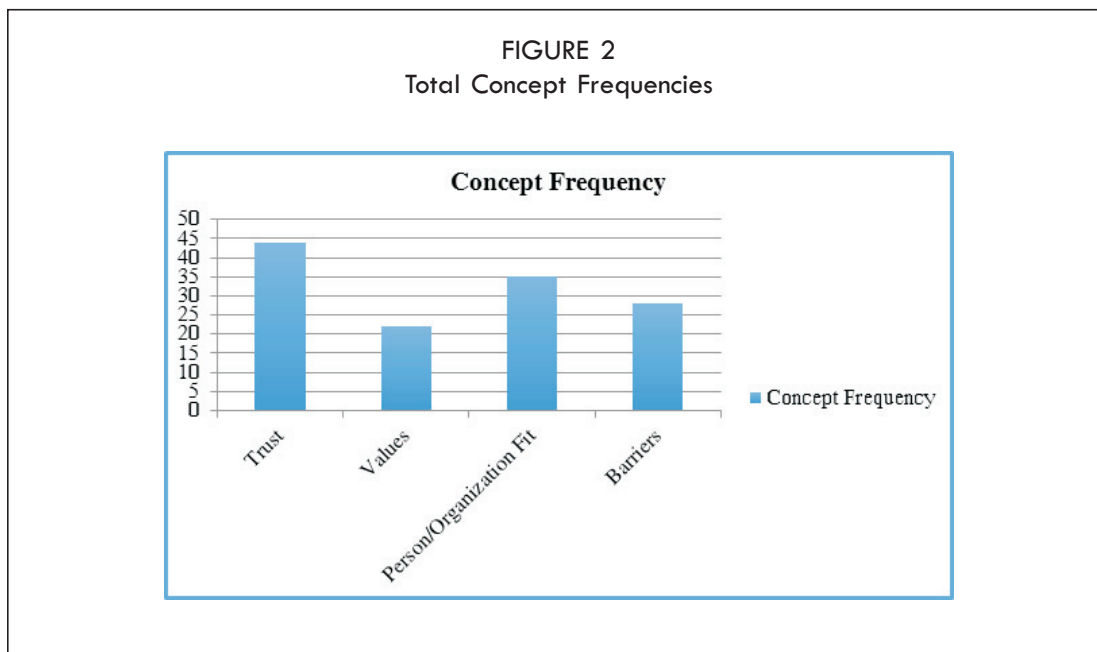

FIGURE 2
Total Concept Frequencies

TABLE 2
Total Category Frequencies

Category	Percent of Overall Comments
Respectful Collaboration	10.1%
Organization Respects and Supports Employee's Identity at Work	24.0%
Understanding and Acknowledgement of Balance	12.4%
Understanding and Acknowledgement of Aboriginal Worldviews	4.7%
Time Perspectives: Looking Forward-Looking Back	16.3%
Cultural Values in the Workplace	10.9%
Financial/Economic Barriers	15.5%
Identity Stereotypes/Racism	6.2%

Analytical Statistics

We conducted cross-tabulation analyses comparing observed versus expected frequencies of concepts and categories within each of our three different themed sharing circles (Krippendorff, 2004). Statistically significant differences between an observed count and expected count indicates that participants commented more (or less) frequently about a particular topic than would be expected if the comments were distributed with perfect proportionality (i.e., people talked about all categories and concepts with equal frequency across all sharing circles).

Our results showed that in the first sharing circle, *Diversity of our Stories: Experiences at Work*, at the concept level Values were discussed significantly less than expected (*Observed* = 2, *Expected* = 10.4, *Standardized Residual* = −2.6) and Barriers were discussed significantly more than expected (*Observed* = 20, *Expected* = 13.2, *Standardized Residual* = 1.9). At the category level, we found Balance (*Observed* = 1, *Expected* = 7.6, *Standardized Residual* = −2.4) and Organization Respects and Supports Employee's Identity at Work (*Observed* = 9, *Expected* = 14.7, *Standardized Residual* = −1.5) were discussed significantly less than expected. Financial/Economic Barriers were discussed significantly more than expected (*Observed* = 14, *Expected* = 9.5, *Standardized Residual* = 1.5). In other words, the significant Barriers effect at the concept level was driven by a high frequency of discussion about Financial/Economic Barriers. Only at the narrower category level, we did find an effect related to the concept of Trust, namely the category of Organization Respects and Supports Employee's Identity at Work that was discussed less than expected. Together, these data suggest that conversations about past experiences at work were significantly coloured by barriers — external and systemic factors that negatively impacted access to and experiences at work. Participants did not associate experiences in the workplace (e.g., values or trust) with this sharing circle topic.

Our second sharing circle, *Achieving Balance in a Give-and-Take World*, was marked at the concept level, not surprisingly, with more comments about Values than expected (*Observed* = 18, *Expected* = 7.3, *Standardized Residual* = 3.9) and fewer comments about Barriers than expected (*Observed* = 3, *Expected* = 9.3, *Standardized Residual* = −2.1). At the category level, we found that Balance was discussed more often (*Observed* = 15, *Expected* = 5.3, *Standardized Residual* = 4.2) and Financial/Economic Barriers less than

expected (*Observed* = 2, *Expected* = 6.7, *Standardized Residual* = −1.8). Because the sharing circle theme included "Balance," we re-analyzed the data excluding any comments coded as "Balance" that might confound other significant relationships. The results showed that Understanding and Acknowledgement of Aboriginal Worldviews were discussed more often and Financial/Economic Barriers less than expected, although these differences did not reach statistical significance. Together, we see that participants talked about achieving balance in terms of both Aboriginal worldviews related to balance across work and community and also workplace acknowledgement of Aboriginal worldviews more generally. Participants did not associate financial or economic barriers to work with this sharing circle topic.

In our third sharing circle, *Visions of an Aboriginal-Canadian Workplace*, there were no concepts or categories that were discussed significantly more or less than expected. These findings suggest that when thinking about work in the future, participants felt trust, values, person–organization fit, and barriers were all important considerations.

Summary

Interestingly, the conclusions we draw from our look at sharing circle conversations using quantitative academic methods are two-fold. When viewing the conversations using a descriptive lens, a pure frequency count of topics across all sharing circles highlighted issues related to organizational respect for cultural identity at work (a facet of trust), time perspectives: looking forward looking back (a facet of person–organization fit), and financial/economic barriers (a facet of barriers), but not balance or Aboriginal worldviews. In contrast, controlled statistical analyses of conversations within each sharing circle suggested that balance and Aboriginal worldviews were primary topics of conversation in the sharing circle about achieving balance in a give-and-take world. These same analyses suggest that financial/economic barriers were emphasized in conversations only in the sharing circle about experiences at work, and when reflecting on the future, participants discussed all concepts and categories equally. In other words, there appears to be a temporal influence on the conversation topics.

These analyses suggest some similar and some novel ways of seeing our knowledge sharing experiences. The different ways in which we interpret and understand our sharing circle conversations is like a kaleidoscopic lens that may inform how we move forward with conversations about Aboriginal experiences at work. The variation of topics in reflections about the past, present, and future highlight the importance of looking back to understand the historical context and barriers that helped shape the experiences Aboriginal employees have today. One way to do this is to talk with Elders about the meaning and understanding of traditional work, to hear stories of work before and after colonization and to understand the words associated with work in Aboriginal voices. Our conversations suggest that in learning about contemporary work experiences, traditional values for balance and time perspectives: looking forward-looking back can provide an organizing framework to understand workplace stories that are told in employees' voices and in employees' workspaces, accounting for time and place.

In moving ahead, we can take a more holistic view of workplace experiences, using Indigenous models of interconnectedness to guide our listening, for example a framework of self, family, community, and nation growth or one of intellectual, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being (Archibald, 2008). For example, whereas academic researchers have

found person–organization fit related to trust (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011) reduced turnover, increased citizenship behaviours, and organizational commitment (Gregory, Albritton, & Osmonbekov, 2010), for Aboriginal employees, the concept of person–organization fit may need to be redefined, reframed, and understood in terms of a more holistic person–family–community–organization fit. Another consideration for future conversations is the role of language and dialecticalism (Kovach, 2010), as a Western binary mindset and language that emphasizes "either/or" and cannot see or express "both/and" may blind us to a holistic Indigenous understanding of work.

Several limitations of these analyses should be considered. First, all of our conversations proceeded in the same temporal sequence over our two days together. Therefore, we cannot say whether participants discussed certain topics less as time progressed simply because they had already shared about those topics. Second, our sharing circle participants were both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. We maintained confidentiality and did not track who offered what comment. Thus, we cannot infer salience of the topics for Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal participants. Finally, while it is interesting to consider what topics were shared more or less than expected, it is also important to consider what topics were shared consistently or equally across sharing circles and time, namely respectful consideration, cultural values in the workplace, and identity stereotype/racism. These topics transcended the specific discussion themes and were part of the conversation in all sharing circles.

CONCLUSION

With this work, we share our process of thinking, listening, and beginning to learn about Aboriginal experiences at work. We describe the ways in which we framed and disseminated shared knowledge to three different audiences in three different contexts. Guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2012), we gathered shared lived experiences of work and visions for the future. In conclusion, we reflect on the ways in which our distinct audiences and contexts shaped the messages we shared. We then consider how our work complements and goes beyond existing research on Aboriginal experiences at work. Finally, we offer considerations for research moving forward. With the basis for learning grounded in the stories that were told, an iterative approach to understanding was possible. Friedland and Napoleon (2015) note that using and analyzing stories for answers to a specific question "does not mean those stories are frozen or forever reduced to only one simplistic and immutable "answer" or rule" (p. 25). Thus, using the stories in three different ways, and at three different times, provided a progression of learning, and more understanding than a single effort would have.

The learning that we gained from this research process was enhanced by the iterative nature of the activity. With each different round and type of approach, the team gleaned new knowledge. First, based on our perceptions immediately following the event, we reached consensus on four primary themes as important to the conversation about Aboriginal experiences in the Canadian workplace: youth self-efficacy, psychological safety at work, resilience as an Aboriginal trait, and balance in life. Second, and after a few months, we regrouped and revisited our sharing circle notes after having thought for some time on our own about our experiences. We considered what messages might be most important to share with an audience of business people and development officers. We thought about how our

themes related to organizational practices, and we framed our message around cultural safety in the workplace and mentorship. The third interpretation of the knowledge shared at the 2016 event was prepared according to the theoretical foundations and methodological approaches taught in the Academy. Using qualitative and quantitative content analysis, we found that trust and self-identity at work were the most frequently discussed themes, but financial/economic barriers and balance were the only categories discussed significantly more than others when controlling for the overall number of comments within each sharing circles.

While these themes may appear to be different, the underlying message is the same. Our team's initial impressions of the shared stories included specific messages of strength and resilience that we could translate into practical recommendations to promote cultural safety and employee mentorship programs. The results from an academic analysis and theoretical approach suggested that conversations focused more on systemic barriers to work in the past and Aboriginal worldviews in the workplace today. Taken together, these three approaches reflect three different levels of subjectivity. Whereas our team's initial impressions were coloured by our own experiences within a particular set of relationships and in a particular place, the qualitative content coding provides a more objective and abstract interpretation of the words and messages shared. It is important to note that our team also listened to four keynote addresses (see Kwantes et al., 2017) that were not included in the qualitative content coding but may have influenced our own perceptions and interpretations of our experiences.

How our overall reflections relate to existing research on Indigenous experiences at work can also inform our learning. Some concepts that arose in our work and other recent research on work–family conflict (Julien et al., 2017) and careers (Juntunen et al., 2001; Juntenen & Cline, 2010) include systemic barriers that impact experiences at work and the importance of balance. The concept of cultural safety is related to our opening discussion about cultural identity conflict at work that is also reported in the work–family conflict and career research. Themes that arose for us that are not present in the work–family conflict and career research in the Academy include self-efficacy and resilience. Most notably, our conversations suggest that stories about Aboriginal experiences at work may be distinct from stories about bridging work and non-work lives or stories about careers.

Continuing these conversations may help us learn about Aboriginal employees' experiences at work with respect to topics such as effective communication, respectful relationships, and organizational trust. We may begin to understand what workplace experiences are related to employment retention, organizational growth, and economic development in Aboriginal communities and Canada. When the first author shared our interest in understanding Aboriginal experiences at work with Myeengun Henry, who is also an Aboriginal Traditional Counsellor from Chippewa of the Thames First Nation near London, Ontario, Myeengun advised that the first step is to create a spark and start a conversation about these real and important topics. We hope that sharing this work with the event participants, Cando, JAED readers, and the authors' communities, will spark conversations and learning about Aboriginal worldviews and Aboriginal employees' experiences at work.

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