

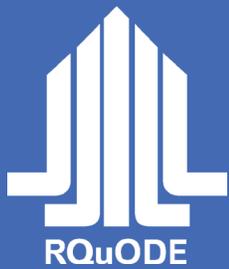


2015

IDENTIFICATION OF INDICATORS TO CREATE AN INNOVATIVE
EMPLOYABILITY INTERVENTION ADAPTED TO INUIT CLIENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | PHASE 1

RESEARCH COMPLETED BY
Regroupement québécois des organismes
pour le développement de l'employabilité



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Executive Summary

In the 2011 Census, roughly 59,000 individuals identified themselves as Inuit, i.e. approximately 4.2% of the total Aboriginal population in Canada and 0.2% of the total population of the country. Three quarters of Inuit live in Inuit Nunangat, a vast territory consisting of four regions, specifically Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut and the Inuvialuit region. A growing proportion of Inuit live in urban (17%) or rural (5%) regions outside of Inuit Nunangat, including in Edmonton, Montreal and Ottawa-Gatineau (Statistics Canada, 2013). Inuit communities across Canada face a variety of social, cultural and economic difficulties, in particular regarding access to housing, education and healthcare. Despite these difficulties, the young Inuit – and more generally young Aboriginal – population will have to assume a growing segment of available jobs in the coming years in the context of a shrinking labour force due in part to population aging.

Notwithstanding the important academic corpus and expertise acquired by career development practitioners, conventional skills development and employment preparation tools do not correspond to the cultural reality or needs of Inuit clients. Given the scarcity of specific guides and measures to foster job integration and retention among this emerging clientele, it is critical to study the distinct characteristics of Inuit culture that may influence their job integration process. Ultimately, this research project aims to develop tailored resources and services embedded in the reality of Inuit people and to respond more efficiently to their needs.

Close to 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Nunavik, Montreal and Ottawa with key stakeholders, such as respected members of the Inuit community, researchers, practitioners and representatives of Inuit organizations. In addition to the literature review, this data collection made it possible to identify and classify the main foundations of Inuit culture under five categories: cultural identity and self-concept, values and beliefs, social dynamics, communication styles and learning methods.

Cultural Identity and Self-Concept

To begin, in the extremely hostile arctic environment, the notion of survival is an indisputable element of the individual and collective identity of Inuit. Survival is moreover tied to the natural environment and the interdependence of groups. These elements have over time shaped a humble and resilient people. Colonization has, however, produced a loss of identity and cultural landmarks, with negative consequences on confidence and social fabric:

My mom was raised by my grandmother who was told that the culture was no good. Even my mom was told that. They didn't know how to live anymore, because their way of life... when they were told that their language was not good, they didn't know what to do anymore. They were taught their culture by the priest, the police. They just did what they were told, not what they believed in. Maybe there they lost their confidence. (Respondent, Nunavik)

These rapid and forced changes have had serious repercussions on Inuit individuals and society despite their resilience, placing them between two worlds (CDPDJ, 2007). This weakened cultural identity, combined with the foreign nature of the process, impacts their employability. In addition, clients' lack of confidence and high humility limit their capacity to project themselves in a professional role and decide on a career.

Values and Beliefs

In regards to values and beliefs, Inuit place emphasis on the environment and the extended family. Their proximity to the land shapes the majority of their traditional activities and guides the organization of their time. Inuit live by the rhythm of the seasons, nature and weather conditions, and therefore conceive time as a series of present moments. Their cyclical vision of time nurtures their adaptability and impacts on long-term planning. The importance of traditional activities and human relations also influences their conception of work, career and education. Work, for example, is generally perceived by Inuit as a way to address an immediate need, and not necessarily for personal or professional fulfilment purposes (Duhaime, 1991):

In terms of job, they are more or less looking for a relief, not a career. People up here think of jobs to do. If I need some money, I am not necessarily going to think «I am going to go for a career». Right now I need money, I don't care what the job is. Tell me what I should do, I need a cheque. I am not necessarily going to do it for a long time. It is not like down South where you study all your life to be good in a certain field. (Respondent, Nunavik)

In a labour market based on a foreign set of values, Inuit seek balance between traditional and paid activities, between survival and consumption. It is therefore important for career development practitioners to adapt their interventions to the values and beliefs of Inuit culture that, despite deep changes imposed by modernity, remain solidly entrenched.

Social Dynamics

Traditionally, Inuit have a deep sense of collectivism, focusing on the primacy of family over the individual, and belonging to the group. This emphasis on social links amplifies the need for the practitioner to build a relationship of trust with the client before service delivery (Alberta Education, 2005). As with leadership, this relationship of trust can only be acquired over time and through actions: title or uniform do not suffice. Moreover, the rise of individualism among young Inuit is generating societal upheavals and affects intergenerational relations:

[The elders] are the ones with the experience, they have lived full life, they have seen these transitions of different ways of life, and I think they see themselves as source of information, of knowledge, that should be sought out more. The younger generation I think see the elders as being stuck in the past and as almost hindrances to living the type of life that is necessary now in the communities and that would be in the future. I hear a lot of youth complaining that the elders should just move on or take on an advisory role and not necessarily be the leaders, that their time has passed, that it is a different reality now, and it is a tough situation. (Respondent, Montreal)

The advisory role of elders has been subjected to a forced revision, as a result of technological advances and other consequences of modernity. Elders have expressed deep regret about the decrease in the practice of traditional activities. In some cases, this direct contribution to group survival has been replaced by paid activities and, for a few members of the group, by inactivity. An approach that allows clients to understand the impact of their career choices on their families and community will help to make it more concrete (Wihak and Merali, 2003) and open intergenerational dialogue on the Inuit professional identity.

Communications Styles

Keeping with its oral tradition, Inuit culture is rooted in the Inuktitut language. The language not only shapes thought and communication structures, but also individual and collective identity. It involves the transmission of concise, precise and direct factual information, with specific emphasis on results. Non-verbal communication is also prominent among Inuit. Emotions are not often shared, since respect for the individual and his/her privacy imposes a certain degree of reserve. In this regard, career development practitioners should learn to limit their questions with Inuit clients and respect silences:

On pose toujours des questions, mais c'est un peu mal vu de poser trop de questions. Ce qui est important avec la clientèle, c'est d'avoir un lien de confiance. [...] On est habitué à ce que les choses aillent vite, on veut avoir des résultats très vite, mais ce n'est pas toujours comme ça que cela fonctionne. (Respondent, Nunavik)

Very present in Inuit culture, humour and metaphors are used to transmit advices or delicate messages that could be interpreted as a criticism, in order to avoid direct confrontation or the imposition of an idea (Blue, Darou and Ruano, 2002).

Learning Methods

In addition to these distinct communication styles, it is essential for employment service providers to take into account the different learning methods favoured by Inuit culture. First of all, the traditional conception of lifelong, holistic and collective learning (Bougie, Kelly-Scott and Arriagada, 2013; AANDC, 2009) modulates both the rhythm of instruction and interest the formal and structured education system imported from the south:

Our learning is like a dog team. There are many dogs pulling the sled. In our community, there are many people who are teaching the child. And it is in every environment: it's in the home, at the feast, on the land. Many people have responsibilities, of course the parents and the family. The white way is that you have many children with one person in a closed area, only one environment. And it doesn't make sense, why would you do it that way? How can one person teach many children indoors, with them sitting at their desk? (Respondent, Ottawa)

Secondly, in accordance with their visual and practical abilities, Inuit prefer a learning model based on observation and experimentation, i.e. learning on a trial-and-error basis instead of theory. Similarly, storytelling permits the transmission of knowledge acquired through concrete experiences, allowing listeners some flexibility regarding the lessons learned. Interactive and creative learning experiences builds bridges with traditional learning methods and therefore produce better results than didactic methods based on reading and writing (Antone and Gamlin, 2002).

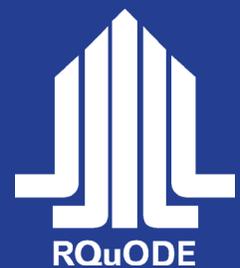
Conclusion

In brief, given the scope of the differences between Inuit culture and Eurocentric culture, plus deep changes affecting Inuit social fabric and identity process, mainstream services are not well tailored to respond to the career development needs of these communities. For instance, neglecting the primacy of family in the career development of Inuit clients or the importance of traditional learning methods such as storytelling in employment counselling will limit the results obtained. In this respect, it would appear that the delivery of specialized services by well-equipped and trained practitioners and organizations is essential to help Inuit achieve professional integration, without altering their path. Created by Inuit for Inuit, these services should be adapted to the multiple transformations – present and future – affecting the cultural identity of the Inuit people.

In addition to contributing to the academic corpus on Inuit culture, this initial theoretical phase will set the course for the creation of a reference guide to optimize employability interventions for Inuit clients.

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