



# BUILDING INCLUSION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADIAN WORKPLACES

BY JENNIFER THORPE-MOSCON, PHD, AND JOY OHM



# Understanding the Indigenous Experience At Work

A long history<sup>1</sup> of colonialism, genocide, and racism has led to inequities in many facets of life for Indigenous Peoples<sup>2</sup> living on the land now called Canada. In the workplace, Indigenous Peoples are underrepresented, suffer a wage gap, and often experience isolation because of a lack of Indigenous role models at senior levels.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, they are regularly surrounded by managers, colleagues, and senior executives who do not truly understand their history and cultures or the burdens they carry.<sup>4</sup>

This Catalyst survey shows Indigenous Peoples also pay an emotional tax at work and experience low levels of psychological safety. Our study findings point to actions managers and team members can take to build the understanding, relationships, and work environments that will help Indigenous Peoples belong, contribute, and thrive in the workplace.<sup>5</sup>

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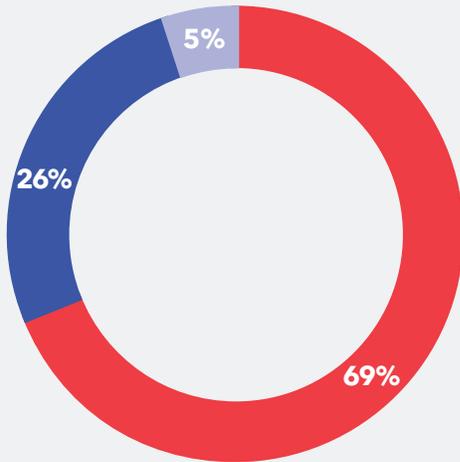
## WHO ARE THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA?

Indigenous Peoples comprise 4.9% of the total Canadian population, and include three groups:<sup>6</sup>

- **First Nations:** A diverse group of Indigenous Peoples who are not Inuit or Métis and who live in cities, towns, and First Nations communities across Canada.<sup>7</sup>
- **Inuit:** Indigenous People who traditionally have lived in Inuit Nunangat, which is composed of the land, water, and ice in the Arctic region, including the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (in the Northern Yukon and the Northwestern parts of Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (in Northern Québec), and Nunatsiavut (in Northern Labrador).<sup>8</sup>
- **Métis:** People descended from Indigenous and European ancestors who self-identify with the distinct Métis culture and ancestry and are accepted by the Métis Nation.<sup>9</sup>

## SURVEY SAMPLE

WE SURVEYED 86 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WORKING IN CANADA.



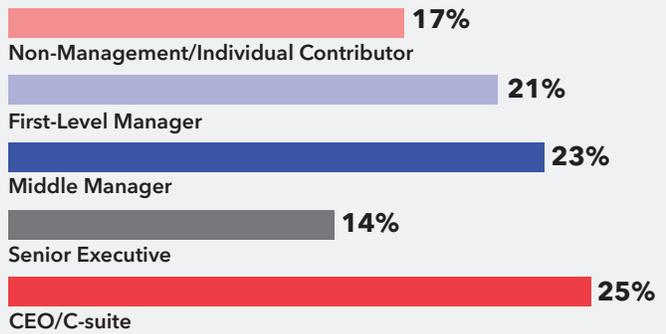
- FIRST NATIONS
- MÉTIS
- INUIT

**43** WOMEN

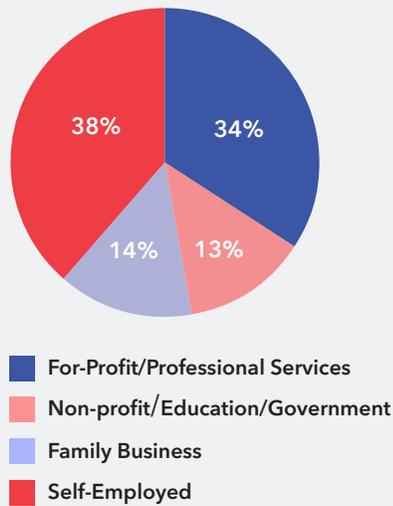
**42** MEN

\*ONE PERSON IDENTIFIED AS ANOTHER GENDER

### JOB LEVEL



### COMPANY TYPE

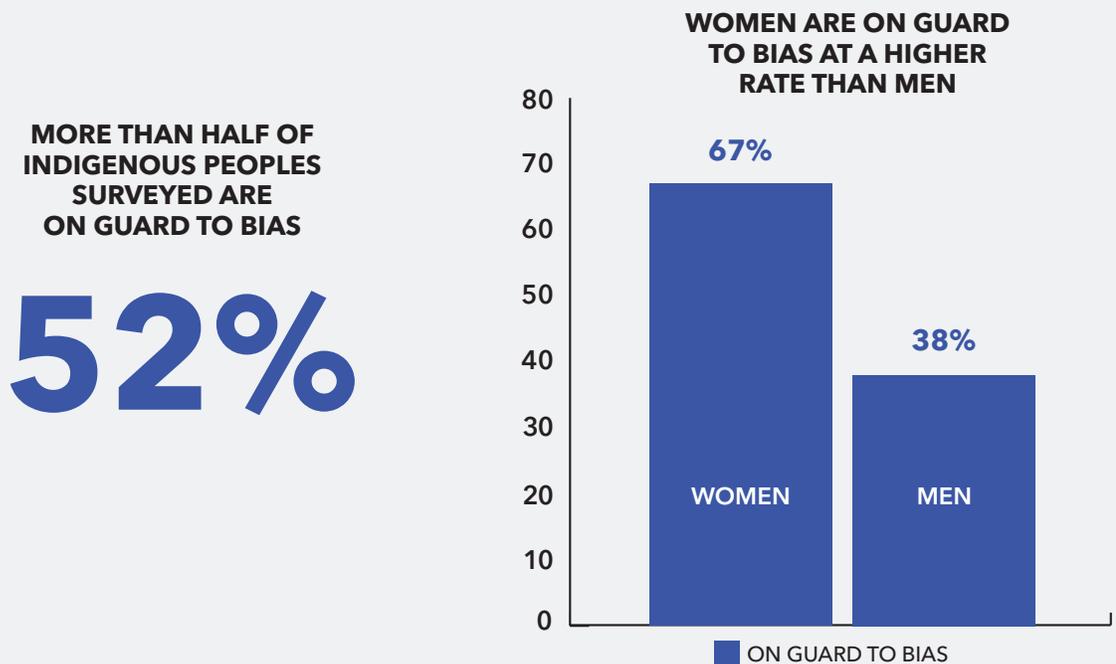


### MEAN AGE



### TOP INDUSTRIES





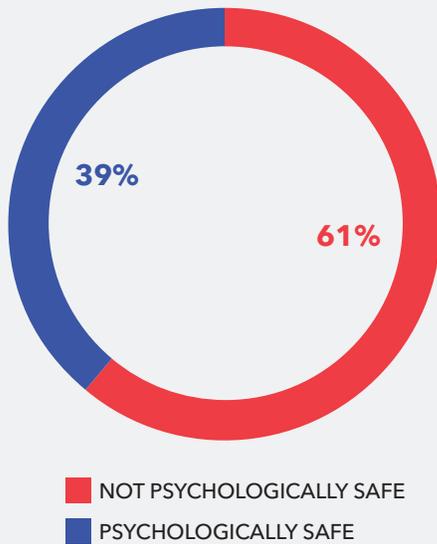
## Emotional Tax

**Emotional tax** is the combination of being on guard to protect against bias because of race, ethnicity, and gender and experiencing the associated effects on well-being and ability to thrive at work.<sup>10</sup>

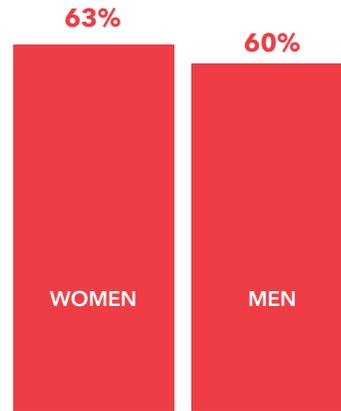
More than half of survey respondents (52%) said that they are regularly on guard to experiences of bias, a hallmark of emotional tax.<sup>11</sup> Being on guard to bias includes feeling the need to prepare for possible insults or avoid certain situations where they anticipate bias may occur. Indigenous women (67%) reported this experience much more commonly than Indigenous men (38%),<sup>12</sup> reflecting the disproportionate discrimination and violence they experience compared to other groups.<sup>13</sup>

Previous Catalyst research conducted in Canada has shown that experiences of emotional tax may be diminished when leaders create an empowering work environment where employees of colour have the autonomy, resources, and support they need to succeed.<sup>14</sup> We found that empowerment was positively related to employee feelings of being valued for their uniqueness, which in turn predicted being less on guard and increased intent to stay at their current job.<sup>15</sup>

**SIX OUT OF 10 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE SURVEYED DO NOT FEEL PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE AT WORK**



**NO GENDER DIFFERENCE WAS IDENTIFIED IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK**

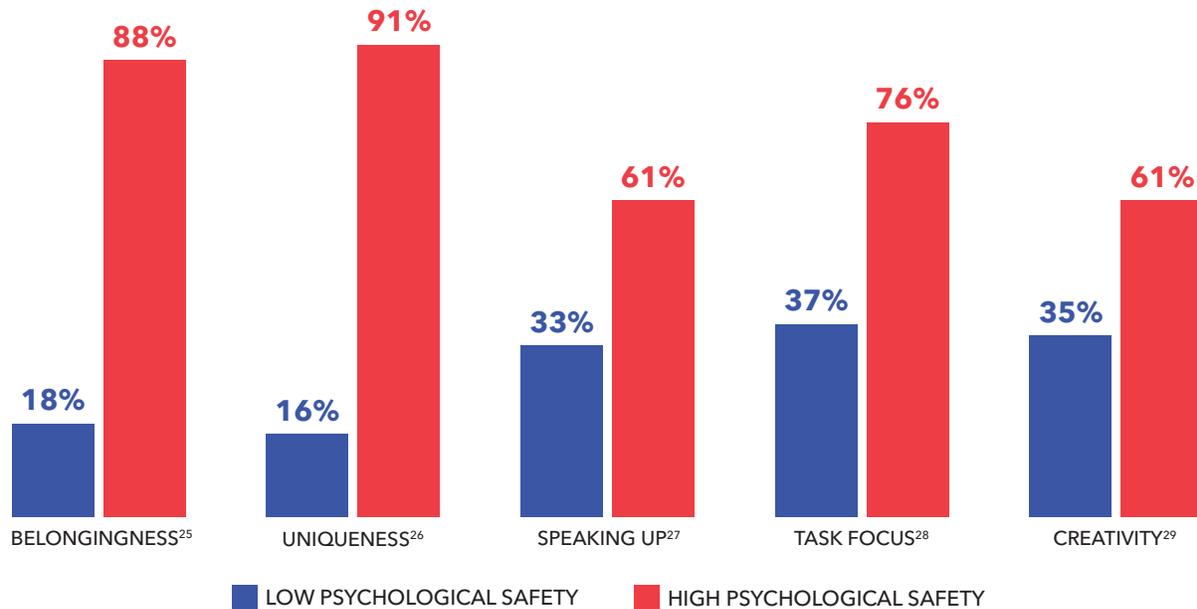


## Psychological Safety

**Psychological safety**—when employees feel they can make mistakes and take risks without being penalized—is an important characteristic of an inclusive and constructive workplace.<sup>16</sup> Yet 61% of Indigenous Peoples we surveyed indicated that they do not or seldom feel psychologically safe at work.<sup>17</sup> There was no significant difference between women and men.<sup>18</sup>

This alarming finding illuminates one way that teams and managers are missing out on the value Indigenous employees bring to the workplace. Indeed, high psychological safety is associated with many positive outcomes, both for Indigenous employees and their companies.

## HIGHER PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY PREDICTS POSITIVE WORKPLACE OUTCOMES



Compared with Indigenous employees with low levels of psychological safety, we found that those who experience high psychological safety are:<sup>19</sup>

- Almost five times as likely to have a sense of belonging.<sup>20</sup>
- Over five times more likely to experience being valued for their uniqueness.<sup>21</sup>
- Nearly twice as likely to speak up<sup>22</sup> when something is not right.
- Twice as likely to report task focus<sup>23</sup>—the mental ability to home in on objectives.
- Nearly twice as likely to report being able to exhibit creativity.<sup>24</sup>

Research supports how vital these factors are. For example:

- Belongingness is part of what it means to be included<sup>30</sup> and is linked to greater intention to stay at one's job<sup>31</sup> and heightened team citizenship behaviours (e.g., pitching in when coworkers are in need).<sup>32</sup>
- Uniqueness is one of the indicators of an inclusive environment and strongly predicts a team's ability to solve problems, among other outcomes.<sup>33</sup>

When companies and leaders fail to nurture workplaces and relationships that promote the psychological safety of Indigenous employees, they risk limiting the potential that their companies and Indigenous employees are able to achieve.

# Take Action With Inclusive Leadership

Demonstrating inclusive leadership—and building the respectful relationships that can drive true inclusion—predict increased psychological safety<sup>34</sup> and decreased emotional tax.<sup>35</sup> In this study, we also found that when leaders create an empowering workplace, show accountability, and demonstrate humility, Indigenous employees feel more psychologically safe.<sup>36</sup>

**Managers:** Practice these behaviours to develop teams where Indigenous employees are truly recognized, valued, and challenged with meaningful work.



## EMPOWERMENT IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

Many people think of “empowerment” as an action or benefit a manager “gives” teams or direct reports. This misunderstanding of empowerment can be disempowering because it implies that empowerment is at the whim of the manager, who gives and takes away power.

Catalyst’s research finds that empowerment is best explained as a characteristic of a workplace.<sup>37</sup> Managers and teammates take actions to help create an empowering environment. When we do this, we create the conditions for people to be empowered through their own actions.

## EMPOWERMENT

- Make sure all team members have what they need to succeed and flourish at work and that they can bring their full selves to work by expressing and sharing their culture.
- Model your own learning, vulnerabilities, and challenges related to tackling inequities and moving out of your comfort zone.
- Gather and enact suggestions for creating a more inclusive workplace.
- Move toward a more collective mindset where the team's health and success are everyone's top priority—and giving back to the community is expected.
- Foster opportunities for building respectful, genuine, and trusting relationships among all team members.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

- Hold all team members responsible for their behaviour, development, and work processes.
- Openly discuss how to demonstrate that a wide variety of perspectives, identities, and cultures are valued.
- Set explicit goals for learning, collaboration, and potentially uncomfortable dialogues about colonialism, racism, sexism, and other difficult topics.
- Ask team members and leaders how they interrupt biased behaviours and processes.
- Incorporate accountability to the community, environment, and future generations into all decisions.

## HUMILITY

- Challenge yourself to learn more about the historical and current experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
- Practice humble listening by setting aside preconceived notions of how the world works, and truly hear what another person's experience of the world is like.
- Explore Indigenous values. One such example, of many, is the Anishinaabe People's Seven Teachings of love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, wisdom, and truth, which are shared by many Indigenous Peoples across the land.<sup>38</sup>
- Learn from and with team members through conversation—sharing perspectives and challenging one another, not trying to “win.”
- Be willing to admit your own mistakes; find grace for coworkers to make mistakes and take risks without being penalized.

We extend our immense gratitude to the Indigenous reviewers of this report for their invaluable feedback and guidance as well as study participants for sharing their perspectives and insights.

WE THANK OUR LEAD FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION DONORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR WORK IN THIS AREA.

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## Endnotes

1. To learn more about this history, start with *Research, Reading, and Resources About Indigenous Peoples in Canada: Ask Catalyst Express*.
2. We use the term "Indigenous" to refer to the peoples who lived and continue to live on the land now called Canada before it was colonized. This includes the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who are legally recognized as "Aboriginal" in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution Act in 1982.
3. *How Canada performs: Social outcomes in the territories*. The Conference Board of Canada; Lamb, D., Yap, M., & Turk, M. (2018). *Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal wage gaps in Canada: Evidence from the 2011 National Household Survey*. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 73(2), 225-251; Anderson, T. (2019). *Aboriginal Peoples survey: Employment of First Nations men and women living off reserve*. *Statistics Canada; Widening the circle: Increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people in the workplace*. (2012). Deloitte.
4. Julien, M., Somerville, K., & Brant, J. (2017). *Indigenous perspectives on work-life enrichment and conflict in Canada*. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 36(2), 165-181; *Widening the circle: Increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people in the workplace*. (2012). Deloitte; Overmars, D. (2019). *Wellbeing in the workplace among Indigenous People: An enhanced critical incident study*, [Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia].
5. Please note that this is a sample of Indigenous Peoples working in Canada and that individual experiences will vary by person and workplace.
6. *National Indigenous Peoples Day...by the numbers*. Statistics Canada.
7. Vowel, C. (2016). *Indigenous writes: A guide to First Nation, Métis and Inuit issues in Canada*. Highwater Press; *About AFN*. Assembly of First Nations.
8. Vowel (2016), 56-57.
9. *Citizenship*. Métis Nation.
10. Travis, D. J. & Thorpe-Moscon, J. (2018). *Day-to-day experiences of emotional tax among women and men of colour in the workplace*. Catalyst.
11. Being on guard to bias is a three-item composite measured on a 7-point scale where 1 = almost never, 4 = sometimes, and 7 = almost always. Being on guard is defined as being on guard sometimes ("4") or more often, and percentages reported are based on this dichotomous split of the composite. Adapted from Hicken, M. T., Lee, H., Ailshire, J., Burgard, S. A., & Williams, D. R. (2013). "Every shut eye, ain't sleep": The role of racism-related vigilance in racial/ethnic disparities in sleep difficulty. *Race and Social Problems*, 5(2), 100-112; Hicken, M. T., Lee, H., Morenoff, J., House, J. S., & Williams, D. R. (2014). Racial/ethnic disparities in hypertension prevalence: Reconsidering the role of chronic stress. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(1), 117-123.
12. There is a significant gender difference in the percentage of women and men who are on guard to bias:  $\chi^2(1) = 6.87$ ,  $p < .01$ . A t-test confirms that the relationship holds with the continuous variable as well; women are more on guard to bias than men,  $t(82) = 2.70$ ,  $p < .01$ .
13. *Indigenous overrepresentation in the criminal justice system*. (2019). Department of Justice Canada; *Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the National Inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls*. (2019).
14. Thorpe-Moscon, J., Pollack, A., & Olu-Lafe, O. (2019). *Empowering workplaces combat emotional tax for people of colour in Canada*. Catalyst.
15. Thorpe-Moscon, Pollack, & Olu-Lafe (2019).
16. For example, Travis, D. J., Shaffer, E., & Thorpe-Moscon, J. (2019). *Getting real about inclusive leadership: Why change starts with you*. Catalyst; Prime, J. & Salib, E. R. (2015). *The secret to inclusion in Australian workplaces: Psychological safety*. Catalyst; Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 350-383; Bradley, B. H., Postlethwaite, B. E., Klotz, A. C., & Hamdani, M. R. (2012). Reaping the benefits of task conflict in teams: The critical role of team psychological safety climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(1), 151-158; Hirak, R., Peng, A. C., Carmeli, A., & Schaubroeck, J. M. (2012). Linking leader inclusiveness to work unit performance: The importance of psychological safety and learning from failures. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 23, 107-117; Kirkman, B. L., Cordery, J. L., Mathieu, J., Rosen, B., & Kukenberger, M. (2013). Global organizational communities of practice: The effects of national diversity, psychological safety, and media richness on community performance. *Human Relations*, 66(3), 333-362; Carmeli, A., Sheaffer, Z., Binyamin, G., Reiter-Palmon, R., & Shimoni, T. (2014). Transformational leadership and creative problem-solving: the mediating role of psychological safety and reflexivity. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 48(2), 113-135; Stoverink, A. C., Chiaburu, D. S., Li, N., & Zheng, X. (2017). Supporting team citizenship: The influence of team social resources on team-level affiliation-oriented and challenge-oriented behavior. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 28(2) 1-15.
17. Psychological safety is a four-item composite measured on a 5-point scale where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. Being psychologically safe is defined as being psychologically safe at least often (4 on the scale), and percentages reported are based on this dichotomous split of the composite.
18. There is no significant gender difference in likelihood of being psychologically safe,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.13$ ,  $p > .10$ . A t-test confirms that there is no relationship with the continuous variable either; there is no difference between women and men on psychological safety,  $t(81) = -.36$ ,  $p > .70$ .
19. Regressions were performed to determine the relationship between psychological safety and the five outcome variables. Increased psychological safety predicts belonging ( $b = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and uniqueness ( $b = .92$ ,  $p < .001$ ), speaking up ( $b = .83$ ,  $p < .001$ ), task focus ( $b = .92$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and creativity ( $b = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
20. Belongingness is feeling that you're an integral part of the team, that you have common ground with your colleagues; Prime, J. & Salib, E. R. (2014). *Inclusive leadership: The view from six countries*. Catalyst; Stamper, C. L. & Masterson, S. S. (2002). Insider or outsider? How employee perceptions of insider status affect their work behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(8), 875-894.
21. Uniqueness is being valued for your distinctiveness; Prime & Salib (2014); scale developed by Catalyst.
22. Speaking up focuses on doing so when something needs to be said or when something happens that is not seen as appropriate, Premeaux, S. F. & Bedeian, A. G. (2003). *Breaking the silence: The moderating effects of self-monitoring*

- in predicting speaking up in the workplace. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(6),1537-1562.
23. Task focus is being able to concentrate and pay close attention to one's work. Adapted from the mindfulness scale developed by Feldman, G., Hayes, A., Kumar, S., Greeson, J., & Laurenceau, J. P. (2007). Mindfulness and emotion regulation: The development and initial validation of the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R). *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 29(3), 177-190.
  24. Creativity is identifying opportunities for new products and processes and trying out new ideas and approaches to problems; Prime & Salib (2014); Woodman, R. W., Sawyer, J. E., & Griffin, R. W. (1993). Toward a theory of organizational creativity. *Academy of Management Review*, 18, 293-321; Zhou, J. & George, J. M. (2001). When job dissatisfaction leads to creativity: Encouraging the expression of voice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), 682-696.
  25. Belongingness is a three-item composite measured on a 5-point scale where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. Percentages presented reflect a score on the composite of 4 ("often") or higher.
  26. Uniqueness is a four-item composite measured on a 5-point scale where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. Percentages presented reflect a score on the composite of 4 ("often") or higher.
  27. Speaking up is a four-item composite measured on a 7-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, and 7 = strongly agree. Percentages presented reflect a score on the composite of 5 or higher, so at least somewhat agreeing.
  28. Task focus is a two-item composite measured on a 7-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, and 7 = strongly agree. Percentages presented reflect a score on the composite of 5 or higher, so at least somewhat agreeing.
  29. Creativity is a four-item composite measured on a 7-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, and 7 = strongly agree. Percentages presented reflect a score on the composite of 5 or higher, so at least somewhat agreeing.
  30. Travis, Shaffer, & Thorpe-Moscon (2019).
  31. Thorpe-Moscon, J. (2015). *Inclusion is key to keeping Canadian high potentials*. Catalyst.
  32. Prime & Salib (2014).
  33. Travis, Shaffer, & Thorpe-Moscon (2019).
  34. Prime & Salib (2015).
  35. Thorpe-Moscon, Pollack, & Olu-Lafe (2019).
  36. Separate regressions were performed to understand the relationship of each inclusive leadership behaviour with psychological safety. Empowerment, defined as enabling direct reports to develop and excel, is a five-item composite measure. Accountability, defined as demonstrating confidence in direct reports by holding them responsible for performance they can control, is a three-item composite. Humility, defined as admitting mistakes, learning from criticism and different points of view, and acknowledging and seeking contributions of others to overcome one's limitations, is a five-item composite. All three inclusive leadership behaviours are measured on a 5-point scale where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. Adapted from van Dierendonck, D. & Nuijten, I. (2011). The Servant Leadership Survey: Development and validation of a multidimensional measure. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26(3), 249-267. Empowerment ( $b = .61, p < .001$ ), accountability ( $b = .62, p < .001$ ), and humility ( $b = .62, p < .001$ ) all predict psychological safety.
  37. Thorpe-Moscon, Pollack, & Olu-Lafe (2019); Travis, Shaffer, & Thorpe-Moscon (2019).
  38. *The Seven Teachings*. Southern First Nations Network of Care; *The Gifts of the Seven Grandfathers*. Ojibwe.net.

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