Safety in the Workplace:
Responses from Nokiiwin Tribal Council Community Members

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INTRODUCTION

- Many Indigenous communities are isolated from employment opportunities

- Some Indigenous people who leave their communities for work are not satisfied due to the lack of safety in the workplace (Ruwhiu & Carter, 2016; Curtis et al., 2012)

- Very little research has been conducted to ask Indigenous workers their perspectives of safe work

  OBJECTIVES:
  - Understand the meaning of "safe work"

  - Understand factors related to safety at work

METHODS

- Recruitment was done through the G'minoomaadozimin Steering Committee or through attendance at various Nokiiwin events (Unity Gathering and 'Our Respectful Community – An Inside Job, Part II' Conference)

- Focus Groups x 6
- 4 formal sessions
- 2 around the sacred fire
- Sessions were anywhere between 30 minutes to 2 hours in length

34 Participants:
- At least 18 years old
- Employed or previously employed
- 31 completed the pre-focus group survey
- Age range: 20 – 73 years
- 21 Female; 10 male; 3 unknown

Discussions were focused around 3 questions:

1) What does work mean to you?
2) What does 'safe' or 'being safe' mean to you at work?
3) How does workplace safety or lack thereof influence you physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually?

Data Collection and Analysis:

- As researchers, we do not have pre-conceived notions of how Indigenous workers understand their work environment. Thus, a grounded theoretical framework was used in data collection and analysis

- Grounded theory method ensures that data collection and analysis are interwoven (Neuman & Robson, 2014)

- Sequential guidelines for analysis in grounded theory:

1) data collection
2) open coding
3) axial coding
4) open coding

RESULTS

Selection of pre-focus group survey data collected from participants:

Occupation	Status of Employment	Occupation	Status of Employment
Cultural Consultant	F/T	Student Placement	Casual
Restorative Justice	Causal	Health and Safety Advisor	F/T Contract
Restorative Justice	F/T	Indigenous Relations Manager	F/T
Human Resources Assistant	Contract	Councilor	F/T
Bookkeeping	No response	Communications/ Server	P/T and Contract
Site Facilitator	No response	Community Mentor	F/T
Ontario Works	F/T Permanent	Ontario Works Administration	F/T Permanent

Selection of focus-group responses from participants:

Recognition of life skills

"I'm here because I want to be here [and use my] life skills, educational skills, family skills, whatever you want to call them, and just bring [them] to the job and honouring people and serving people the best you can."

"Not to be lazy". The participant was asked to describe where the statement 'not to be lazy' comes from? They stated, "my interpretation of it is like to always be productive […] not just in the workplace, but also in your home […] work isn't just employment work, but it's also work for your family."

Family work values matter
"My grandfather's where I got my work ethic from […] he was one of the hardest working men in my family."

"That generation [older - now in their 60s +) understands the value of money a lot more. Like a lot of kids [in] this day and age just get a lot of things handed to them."

Nature of Work has changed
"It's different work […] years ago, our parents and our grandparents would be in the bush working, maybe they'd be cutting logs, they'd be trapping, maybe hunting. Now it's administration work that's being done, delivering programs to the community."

"The nature of what you actually have to do for employment has changed. The nature of accomplishment has not […] work is still the appreciation of a job well done."

Empower Youth
"Our youth need to be trained and need to be given more life skills training before they actually do get out into the workforce. I think they need to be trained in how to address racism when it surfaces."

"Teach them conflict resolution. Cause some people like youth go into a workforce and they might get scolded by their boss and they don't know how to handle it."

Indigenous Workplaces should support employees
"If you have a good workplace that is supporting, you don't have to spend your stress there, or gain stress there and bring it home. Having a safe and healthy work environment means you go home happy, and free from injury."

"When they [supervisors, co-workers, management] empower you […] When they recognize something in you that you don't recognize […] they tell it to you in a good way, well this is what I'd like you to do and this is what I'd like you to focus on because I think it would really help you build in your job. And you think really? I never thought, thank you, I will focus on that […] it's an approach [in] the way people speak to you in a respectful way and you just want to do more."
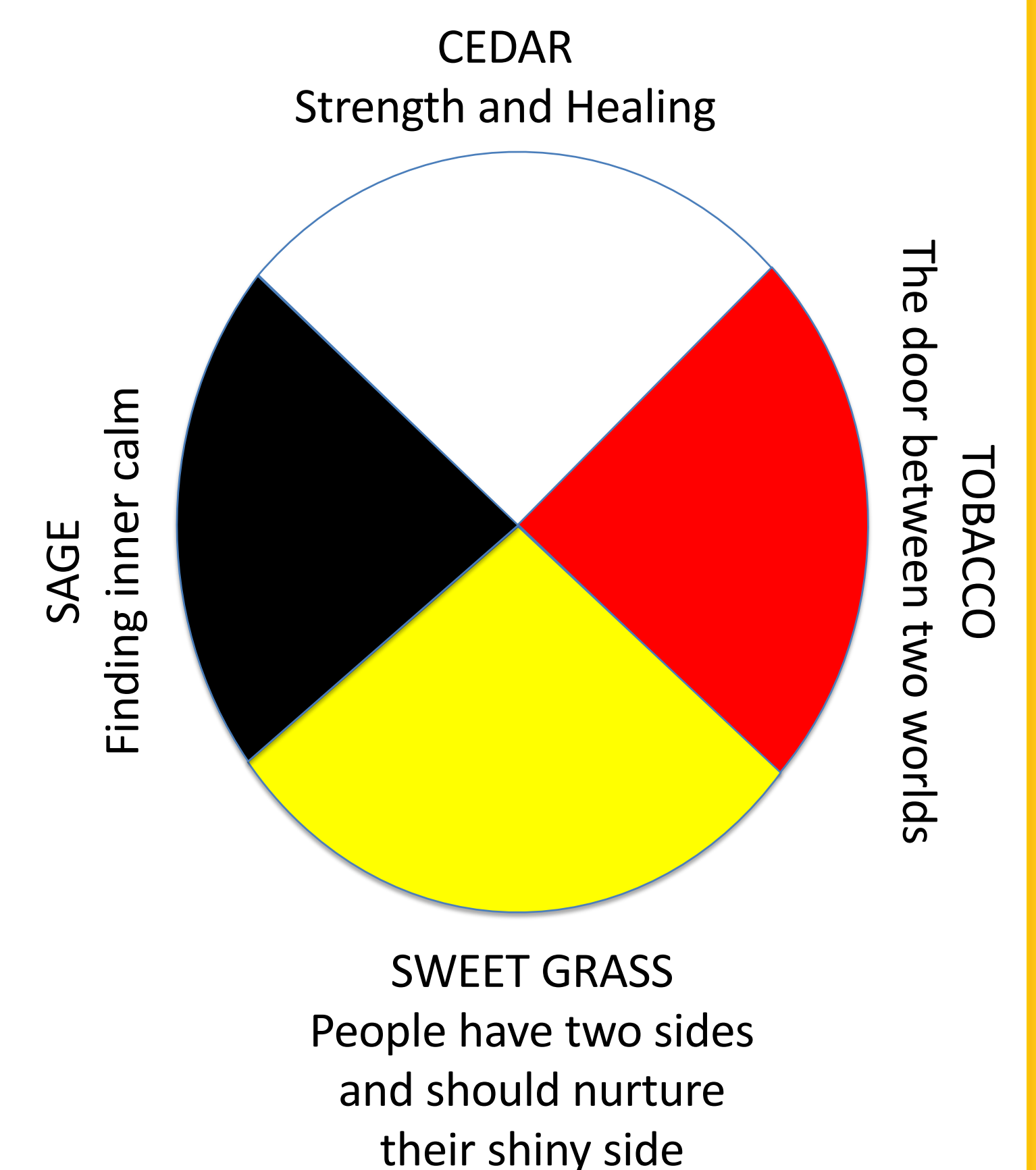
Indigenous Workplaces should ensure job security
"Safety is job security […]There is no job security because a lot of the programs on the first nation […] is dependent on funding […] you got to keep applying for the funding."

Workplaces should incorporate Indigenous culture
"I used my medicines. I smudge. And I always had it in my office and anybody and everybody who walked to my door would come in and smudge if they needed to and I smudge the whole band office […] It was worthwhile and not to ignore, to ignore the negative about your job […] sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, and cedar […] I'll smudge and that will help me and purify myself, purify my body and I'll have a good night sleep and the next day I'm great again to go back to work."

"Making sure that the supervisors are culturally sensitive, cause if they're not, that could damage someone spiritually, their supervisor's a pretty important person in their life. If they're not reaffirming their spiritual values, that's pretty damaging for a person."

SYMBOLISM

CEDAR
Strength and Healing

SAGE
Finding inner calm

TOBACCO
The door between two worlds

SWEET GRASS
People have two sides and should nurture their shiny side

CONCLUSIONS

The key messages from the focus group data acknowledge that Indigenous people want:

1) stable work;
2) their Indigenous culture and traditions to be respected in the workplace; and
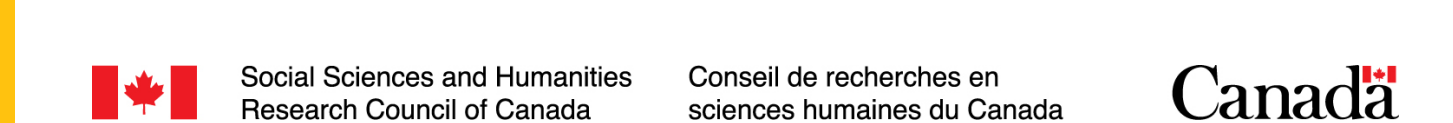3) to be physically and mentally safe while at work.

Moving forward, workplace policies in the Nokiiwin communities should acknowledge the messages community members bring forward: stable, culturally safe employment is important.

Next steps in this project include a scoping review of the academic and grey literature to identify interventions addressing important workplace factors identified in the focus groups.

This information will help Nokiiwin Tribal Council communities to enhance labour force productivity and recognize potential issues in the workplace.

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