The Conference Board of Canada

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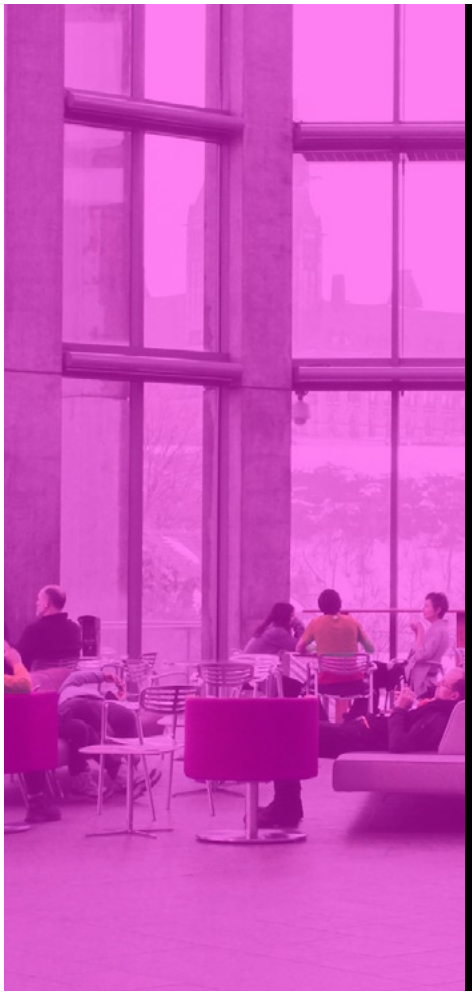
Future Skills Centre

Organizational Design Tools for Leaders

Systems and Structures

June 20, 2023

Senior leaders, human resources leaders, human resources team member or occupational health and safety representative



Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada.

If you would like to learn more about this report and other skills research from FSC, visit us at fsc-ccf.ca or contact info@fsc-ccf.ca.

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Key terms

food insecurity: A public health problem caused by access to food that is inadequate (not enough in volume or nutrition) or insecure (too difficult to source) for financial reasons.

Inuit Nunangat: The homeland of Inuit in Canada, encompassing Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut across Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

inuuqatigiitsiarniq: "Respecting others, relationships and caring for people."[1]

pijitsirniq: "Serving and providing for family and/or community."[2]

tunnganarniq: "Fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive."[3]

1 Government of Nunavut, *Public Service Annual Report 2020–21*, 4.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

Understanding how structural and systemic factors impact the workplace

Housing presents challenges for Inuit employees

In 2016, more than half of all Inuit in Inuit Nunangat lived in overcrowded homes,[4] compared with less than 10 per cent for non-Indigenous Canadians. Most Inuit, especially in remote communities, live in public housing, and many families are on wait-lists for public housing.[5]

Inadequate housing creates several types of challenges for employees, including an inability to get enough rest, environmental conditions that lead to chronic health issues, a lack of remote working/learning spaces, and mental health difficulties when there are problems in the home. These challenges impact an individual's ability to look for work and remain working, as well as their ability to be productive while on the job. Inadequate community housing prohibits the growth of small businesses and can lead to out-migration of talent for better opportunities in the south.[6]

Some potential solutions for organizations include providing optional office space for remote workers, partnering with Internet providers to increase connectivity, and contributing time or money to subsidize housing developments.

4 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, *Inuit Nunangat Housing Strategy.*
5 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "2019 Inuit Nunangat Housing Strategy."
6 Participant interview.

High cost of living affects daily life

Participants in our research noted that many communities in Inuit Nunangat lack the fundamentals for sustainable living. The high cost of living is one of the most significant barriers to living in Inuit Nunangat, but more than that, there's a lack of supply in the North—of adequate housing, food security, healthcare, and social supports. Inuit have the highest rates of food insecurity of any Indigenous group in an industrialized nation.[7] The issue of food insecurity may be compounded by an individual's family size and extended family obligations.

Food insecurity impacts mental, physical, and community health, in turn affecting an individual's ability to be present and healthy at work. Low-income Inuit spend most of their financial resources on food and housing.

Hunting, harvesting, and fishing are important cultural practices that help many Inuit maintain food security and supplement income. These practices also provide culturally relevant and nutritious food for families.[8] The time commitment that Inuit need for community food procurement is an important contextual factor that impacts employees' presence at work, given their need to be absent during hunting and harvesting seasons.

7 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*.
8 Brower and others, *Food Sovereignty and Self-Governance*.

Good practices: Harvesting and cultural leaves

Agnico Eagle Mines provides leave for traditional activities like hunting and an annual day to share cultural identity and Inuit Societal Values among staff.[9]

The Nunatsiavut Government also has paid leave, in addition to standard vacation days, for hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering for its permanent full-time and part-time workers.[10]

In 2022, the Nunavut Teachers' Association changed its policy on leaves for hunting, fishing, and harvesting. The leave is now called a "seasonal Inuit cultural leave" to be more inclusive of other traditional activities such as sewing or camping.[11] This expanded approach encourages participation from a wider pool of employees.

9 Kivalliq Inuit Association and Agnico Eagle Mines Limited, "Meliadine Project."
10 Nunatsiavut Civil Service, *Employees Division Regulations (2017)*.
11 Lochead, "New Contract Gives Nunavut Teachers 7% Raise."

Food insecurity also impacts academic achievement. Students learn better when they have adequate nutrition. Food programs can improve attendance and achievement for those who live in food-insecure homes. In turn, higher academic achievement can increase labour market participation and grow an employer's available talent pool.[12]

Organizations can support programs for child and youth nutrition in the communities where they operate. Internally, they can ensure on-site cafeterias or snack rooms and allow paid or unpaid leave during hunting and fishing seasons. They can partner with local hunting associations to contract their members to provide healthy country foods for workers.

12 NVision Insight Group Inc, *Kivalliq Labour Market Needs Foundational Assessment*.

Remote and hybrid work present unique obstacles in Inuit Nunangat

The Government of Nunavut has guidelines in place to ensure Inuit talent are given top priority for remote positions in Inuit Nunangat.[13] The Government of the Northwest Territories offers remote work accommodations, including the possibility of remote work outside of the Northwest Territories.

However, simply making the positions available may not be enough to support Inuit to take on these positions. Some key considerations and obstacles to remote work in Inuit Nunangat include intermittent Internet connectivity, costly home Internet fees, a lack of private space in the home to work, and difficulty maintaining technology.

In a 2020 study by Sanofi Canada, 40 per cent of Canadian benefits plan sponsors indicated that their organization allows employees to work from home.[14] About 4 per cent of all employees expected to do telework are interprovincial workers.[15] Flexible work arrangements are one way that employees perceive their organization to be encouraging of health and wellness.[16] This increasingly remote work environment has advantages for Inuit, including more jobs for those with limited access to transportation, limited mobility, or chronic illness. If employers contribute to addressing structural barriers, they may widen their potential labour pool.

Strategies for organizations include allowing employees to use the company's supply chain methods to import materials or goods like computer equipment, providing fee subsidies for home Internet, and working with local administration to explore opportunities for a community computer lab space.

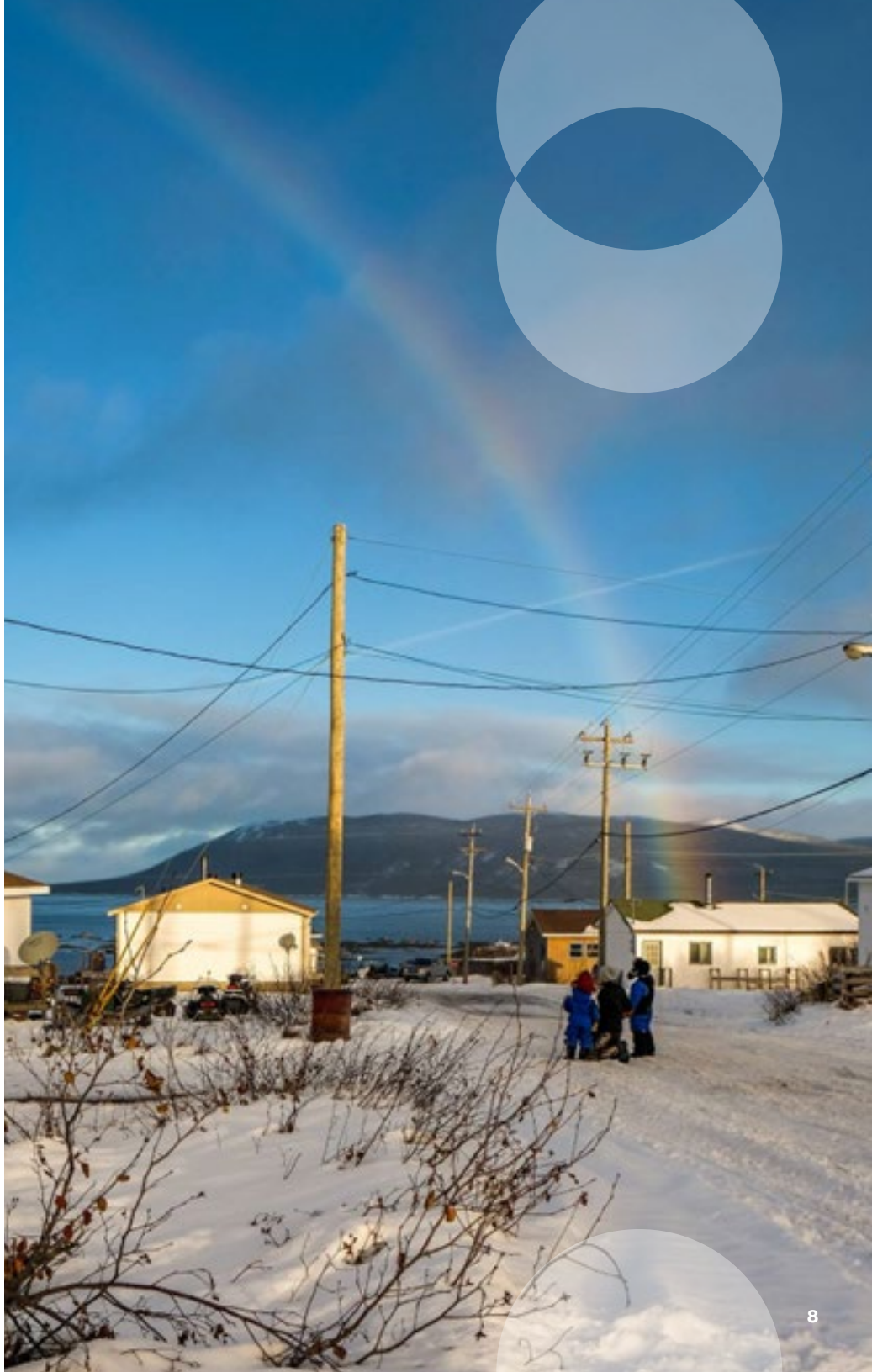
13 Venn, "GN Closing In on Draft Policy."
14 Sanofi, "Sanofi Canada Healthcare Survey," 5.
15 Mehdi and Morissette, *Working From Home for an Employer*.
16 Sanofi, "Sanofi Canada Healthcare Survey," 5.

Community and family responsibilities require flexibility

The Inuit population is young and growing quickly. Most Inuit are in the youngest working-age brackets (15–24, which is followed by a core working age bracket of 25–54), and many Inuit parents struggle to balance childcare with seeking work or remaining on the job. Census data suggests that nearly one-third of core working-age Inuit women reported wanting to work but weren't able to because of their childcare responsibilities.[17]

Access to childcare and flexible work schedules and roles have significant implications for recruitment and retention.[18] One Inuit Societal Value is pijitsirniq ("serving and providing for family and/or community"[19]). We currently see this guiding principle embedded in some best practice human resources policies for organizations connected to Inuit Nunangat. For example, policies for employment leave like compassionate care or bereavement leave have more expansive definitions of "family" and "relatives." Inuit communities emphasize the importance of extended family members through social relations. For example, two people who aren't otherwise related may become connected through a naming custom, socially becoming family members.[20] The definitions in leave policies affect how Inuit workers use and access benefits.

17 Statistics Canada, *Labour Market Experiences of Inuit*.
18 Agnico Eagle Mines and Kivalliq Inuit Association, *Appendix 40: 2021 Kivalliq Labour Market Analysis Report*.
19 Government of Nunavut, *Public Service Annual Report 2020–21*, 4.
20 Tam, Findlay, and Kohen, "Conceptualization of Family."



Good practices: Expanding the concept of "family" in human resources policies

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), the organization that represents Inuit under the Nunavut Agreement, uses broad definitions of both "family" and "relative" in its human resources policies. For example, "family" includes spouses, children, parents, siblings, "or any other close relative who resides in the same home."[21] The term "relative" is even broader. NTI specifically mentions the importance of providing family-centric policies to remain competitive for recruitment and retention.

Similarly, the Nunatsiavut Government provides employees with leave that extends to close relatives who may or may not be related by blood, marriage, or adoption.[22]

The Government of Nunavut also provides special leave to Inuit employees to support their family and "any relative permanently residing in the employee's household or with whom the employee presently resides."[23] Likewise, the Nunavut Teachers' Association refers to foster children in its definition of immediate family.[24]

These examples highlight how employers can accommodate Inuit households that include multiple individuals with ties beyond the single-family unit.[25]

Organizations can promote community and family care by providing on-site childcare, partnering with funding agencies to advocate for families who need childcare spaces, and broadening definitions and policies in leave provisions.

21 Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., *Human Resources Manual*, 3.
22 Nunatsiavut Civil Service, *Employees Division Regulations (2017)*.
23 Government of Nunavut, "Collective Agreement Between the Nunavut Employees Union."
24 Government of Nunavut, "Collective Agreement Between the Nunavut Teachers' Association."
25 Tam, Findlay, and Kohen, "Conceptualization of Family."

Emerging opportunities for mental well-being in the workplace

Providing mental health supports and reducing stigma around mental illness leads to psychologically safe workplaces that are "open, welcoming and inclusive,"[26] embodying tunnganarniq.

A study found that 17 per cent of Indigenous employees who didn't access group benefits reported that they didn't do so because of a previous bad experience.[27] As well, 31 per cent indicated that their needs were better served through other supports.[28] Psychological services can be difficult to access due to a shortage of mental health workers, a need for travel, stigma, and a fear of cultural disconnect with a non-Inuit counsellor. In addition, Inuit experience the impacts of colonial policies as well as current bias. Providing alternative supports and training employees in your organization, especially Inuit employees, in areas like mental health first aid can be beneficial.

While the HR manual of NTI doesn't mention mental health explicitly, it mentions related concerns like alcohol use disorder, family problems, and illness.[29] The manual empowers supervisors to offer flexible work arrangements, time off, and other supports for their team members.

With employers and policy-makers recognizing that domestic violence can present significant challenges to employees, there is a growing movement toward leave policies specific to domestic violence. For example, the Nunavut Teachers' Association has leave provisions for domestic violence and mental illness (tied to sick leave).[30] These actions provide employees with a clear indication that their well-being is valued by the organization. Further, including mental illness and domestic violence in organizational policies helps to destigmatize these issues, making employees feel more comfortable seeking help.

Leaders who would like to learn more about colonization and the impacts of intergenerational trauma to better support their Indigenous workforce can access our training resources.

26 Government of Nunavut, *Public Service Annual Report 2020–21*, 4.
27 Conference Board of Canada, The, *Future-Proofing Investments in Workplace Mental Health*, 14.
28 Ibid.
29 Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., *Human Resources Manual*.
30 Government of Nunavut, "Collective Agreement Between the Nunavut Teachers' Association."

Key recommendations: Where organizations can focus their support

Accommodating Inuit cultural priorities in the workplace has a positive impact on Inuit retention.[31] Organizations can work to dismantle systemic and structural barriers by:

- **accommodating time off for hunting and family responsibilities.** Policies that fail to respect Inuit definitions of kinship and culture can force employees to make difficult decisions regarding time away from work and may decrease employee loyalty and commitment.
- **providing on-site country foods.** Addressing food insecurity can lead to long-term change in the labour market and immediate relief for employees.
- **working with the community to subsidize housing and office space.** Supporting initiatives to improve local built environments can help remote workers and entrepreneurs deal with the high cost of living.

31 Aglu Consulting and Training Inc., Stratos Inc., and Impact Economics, *Appendix 41: Kivalliq Labour Market Analysis*.

Where insights meet impact

Organizational Design Tools for Leaders: Systems and Structures

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