Untapped potential? Attitudes and behaviours of forestry employers toward the Indigenous workforce in Quebec, Canada

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Abstract: The skilled labour shortage in the natural resource sector is a major issue in North America, particularly in the Canadian forestry sector. In the province of Quebec alone, 15 000 positions will need to be filled by 2022. At the same time, many Indigenous communities are seeking to develop employment opportunities, as they have high unemployment rates and a young and growing population. But are forestry employers creating an environment conducive to the recruitment, integration, and retention of an Indigenous workforce? We interviewed 22 directors and human resource managers from 19 forestry businesses (16 non-Indigenous and 3 Indigenous) in Quebec, with a view to answering this question. Employer narratives suggest that they have only just begun to see the potential of the Indigenous workforce and put in place diversity management practices. Partnerships between Indigenous communities and forestry businesses, development of alternative training and skill development methods, and awareness-raising among employees and employers were found to favour recruitment, integration, and retention of Indigenous workers. Conversely, according to participants, stereotypes, discrimination, lack of inclusion measures, drug and alcohol use, and lack of training reduce the potential for Indigenous people to join the forestry workforce.

Key words: forestry, Aboriginal people, diversity management, human resource management, labour scarcity.

Résumé : La pénurie de main-d’œuvre qualifiée dans le secteur des ressources naturelles est un problème important en Amérique du Nord, particulièrement dans le secteur de la foresterie au Canada. Seulement dans la province de Québec, 15 000 emplois devront être comblés d’ici 2022. Au même moment, plusieurs communautés autochtones cherchent à développer les perspectives d’emploi, étant aux prises avec un taux élevé de chômage et une population jeune et en pleine croissance. Mais est-ce que les employeurs en foresterie créent un environnement favorable au recrutement, à l’intégration et à la rétention d’une main-d’œuvre autochtone? Nous avons interrogé 22 directeurs et responsables des ressources humaines provenant de 19 entreprises forestières (16 non autochtones et 3 autochtones) au Québec afin de répondre à cette question. Les commentaires des employeurs indiquent qu’ils commencent à peine à réaliser le potentiel de la main-d’œuvre autochtone et à mettre en œuvre des pratiques de gestion de la diversité. On a constaté que les partenariats entre les communautés autochtones et les entreprises forestières, l’élaboration de méthodes alternatives de formation et de développement des compétences, ainsi que la sensibilisation parmi les employeurs et les employés favorisent le recrutement, l’intégration et la rétention des travailleurs autochtones. À l’inverse, selon les participants, les stéréotypes, la discrimination, l’absence de mesures d’inclusion, l’usage de drogue et d’alcool ainsi que le manque de formation réduisent la possibilité que la population autochtone joigne la main-d’œuvre forestière.

[Traduit par la Rédaction]

Mots-clés : foresterie, population autochtone, gestion de la diversité, gestion des ressources humaines, rareté de la main-d’œuvre.
1. Introduction

The skilled labour shortage in the natural resource sector is a major issue in developed economies, especially in North America (Brereton and Parmenter 2008; Caron et al. 2019). According to the Conference Board of Canada (2019), the problem will likely become worse in the coming years as “every country in the world is experiencing growth in the number and proportion of older persons” (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UNDESA) 2015). Considering the importance of the forestry sector to the Canadian economy (Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) 2018), the labour shortage requires political and industrial actions (Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) 2014; Government of Quebec 2018; NRCan 2018). In the province of Quebec alone, 15 000 positions will need to be filled by 2022 (Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP) 2018). As traditional labour pools are unable to resolve the shortage, efforts need to be directed toward alternative pools. In this context, Indigenous employment has been promoted as a way to address the labour shortage, considering that the young and growing Indigenous population has higher unemployment rates than the non-Indigenous population (First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee (FNILMAC) 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2018). Socially, employment can improve living conditions in Indigenous communities by increasing household income (Ciceri and Scott 2006; Ferdinand et al. 2014; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH) 2017). Therefore, many Indigenous communities in Canada are seeking their fair share of employment in forestry, either by creating businesses (Beaudoin et al. 2009, 2015) or through partnerships with non-Indigenous businesses (Boyd and Trosper 2009).

Many studies have examined the participation of Indigenous communities in the forestry sector, notably on topics relating to inclusion of knowledge and values, participation in decision making, and relationships with the industry (e.g., Saint-Arnaud and Papatie 2012; Tindall et al. 2013; Wilson and Graham 2005). To date, forest managers are mainly seeking to provide Indigenous communities with responsibilities within existing forestry regimes but with limited influence on forest management decisions. Lacking technical, professional, and institutional capacity, Indigenous communities are also struggling to develop forestry models with deep roots in Indigenous rights, values, and needs and to benefit from existing economic opportunities (Beaudoin et al. 2015, 2016). This is important, as factors that promote Indigenous economic development imply communities choosing their own development approaches and putting in place capable and culturally grounded institutions (Jorgensen 2007; Nikolakis et al. 2019). Although some studies have documented the contribution of Indigenous businesses to the forest economy (Beaudoin et al. 2009, 2015; Boyd and Trosper 2009; Proulx 2012), few have focused on the participation of Indigenous people in the forestry workforce.

Guillaume et al.’s (2014, p. 783) Diversity Management Model in Organizations can be used to analyze issues related to recruitment, integration, and retention of the Indigenous workforce. This model explains, based on work motivation logic, “the conditions under which employee dissimilarity within diverse work groups is related to innovation, effectiveness, and well-being”. It includes three sets of factors that favour effective management of diversity in organizations: societal factors (e.g., socioeconomic context and legislation), organizational factors (e.g., diversity management policies and procedures and the beliefs of senior management), and work group factors (e.g., inclusive climate and supervisor leadership). The model suggests that an inclusive climate will limit the influence of individual dissimilarities (e.g., values) while generating a sense of belonging that facilitates motivation at work (Guillaume et al. 2014).

Guillaume et al.’s (2014) model can be used to understand the barriers that Indigenous people face to participate in the labour market. In relation to societal factors, the literature on Indigenous labour largely focuses on socioeconomic issues, among which education is a primary concern (Braden 2011; Brown and Fraehlich 2012; Ciceri and Scott 2006; Jose 2013; Sloan and Oliver 2009). Education level is part of the hiring criteria for many jobs and can thus be a barrier to...

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1 An Indigenous business in Canada is defined in terms of ownership and control (at least 51% Indigenous) and not in terms of Indigenous employment.

2 A fourth set of factors relates to the individual characteristics of workers but will not be addressed here, as it is outside the scope of this study.
attracting Indigenous people to the labour market, as they tend to have lower schooling levels than the non-Indigenous population (Brown and Fraehlich 2012; Ciceri and Scott 2006; Gröschl 2003). Health has also been mentioned as a factor that directly impacts the participation of Indigenous people in the labour market (Anaya 2014; Usher et al. 2005). Indigenous people experience more health problems than national averages (Ferdinand et al. 2014; NCCAH 2017). This is important because health not only affects productivity at work, but also learning capacity (Hunter and Gray 2006; Kalb et al. 2014; Stephens 2010).

Without coercive policies, employers are less inclined to put into place the conditions to favour recruitment, integration, and retention of Indigenous workers, as shown by Caron et al. (2019) for the Canadian mining sector. In Australia, changes to the legal framework were necessary to promote greater Indigenous participation in the labour market (Brereton and Parmenter 2008; McCreary et al. 2016). In Quebec, the political and legislative context does not provide any coercive measures regarding Indigenous employment.

In relation to organizational factors, forestry employers have historically focused on non-Indigenous employees (Beaudry 2015; LeBel 2010; Legendre 2005; Sarathy and Casanova 2008), excluding immigrant and Indigenous workforces. Discrimination based on race is still prevalent and, as explained by Biddle et al. (2013, p. 108), can negatively impact the willingness of Indigenous people “to engage in job search or to attach oneself to the labour market”. The perpetuation of colonial discourse and practices (Molander 2014; Pinto and Blue 2016; Smith 2012) is also likely to negatively impact the Indigenous workforce.

Furthermore, few businesses have a strategy or policy for engaging Indigenous groups, and minimal financial and human resources are generally dedicated to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees (Blackman 2017; Sammartino et al. 2003; Théberge et al. 2018). For a diversity management policy to be effective, it must be accompanied by clear commitments in terms of human and financial resources; therefore, the support of senior management is fundamental (Crawley and Sinclair 2003; Totta and Burke 1995). Moreover, partnerships with Indigenous communities can help businesses attract Indigenous workers, although the empirical evidence is scant (Sloan and Oliver 2009).

The literature on work group factors focuses largely on the importance of culturally safe environments allowing Indigenous employees to work together as part of the same teams (Ewing et al. 2017). Cultural awareness is highlighted as an important factor promoting an inclusive climate in the work group (Ewing et al. 2017; Parmenter and Trigger 2018). However, cultural training appears to give mixed results. On the one hand, it can be counterproductive and difficult to achieve in a politicized postsettler context (Parmenter and Trigger 2018). On the other hand, cultural training has been proven to improve the work climate and build knowledge, relationships, and trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers (Mining Industry Human Resources Council (MiHR) 2012; Parmenter and Trigger 2018; Perkins and Brown 2010). Little is known on how forestry employers are managing Indigenous diversity within work groups.

This study used the Diversity Management Model in Organizations of Guillaume et al. (2014) to document the perceptions of forestry employers on how to create an environment conducive to the recruitment, integration, and retention of Indigenous workers.

2. Methodology
A qualitative research approach was used to study the attitudes and behaviours of forestry employers toward the Indigenous workforce. Employers (directors and human resource managers) from forestry businesses located in seven administrative regions of Quebec, Canada, and representing 80% of the total annual allowable cut (Table 1) were invited to participate. A total of 22 persons from 19 businesses were interviewed. Among these businesses, there were 7 small, 8 medium, and 4 large businesses; 16 of them were non-Indigenous and 3 were Indigenous.

3 Sustainable Forest Development Act (RLRQ, c. A-18.1); Sustainable Forest Management Strategy (Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP) 2015).
4 In Canada, small businesses have 1–99 employees, medium-sized businesses have 100–499 employees, and large businesses have 500 employees or more (Statistics Canada 2015).
Table 1: Characteristics of participants and businesses

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<th>Characteristics of participants (n=22)</th>
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<td>Abitibi-Témiscamingue</td>
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<th>Characteristics of businesses (n=19)</th>
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<td>Indigenous</td>
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<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
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Data were collected between November 2017 and February 2018. A nonprobabilistic, purposive sampling technique was used to identify key informants, with the help of three forest business associations. Interviews were conducted with directors and human resource managers to collect information on the societal, organizational, and work group factors of the Diversity Management Model in Organizations (Guillaume et al. 2014). Accordingly, the interview guide was developed following Guillaume et al.’s (2014) model. Data collection stopped when information saturation was reached (i.e., when additional interviews no longer provided new information), following Mukamurera et al.’s (2006) guidelines.

NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd.) was used to carry out a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. First, data were organized into three groups of factors (i.e., core codes), following Guillaume et al.’s (2014) model. Second, NVivo was used to break down core codes into nine key themes.

3. Results
Throughout this section, interview codes are used and are defined as follows: E, employer number (E1–E19); S, small; M, medium; L, large; and I, Indigenous. For example, E5-S-I represents a small, Indigenous business numbered E5, and E1-M represents a medium, non-Indigenous business numbered E1.

3.1. Organizational factors
3.1.1. Employer attitudes toward the Indigenous workforce
Forestry employers who took part in this study exhibited three main attitudes toward hiring Indigenous workers: positive interest, ambivalent interest, and no particular interest. Firstly, the majority (14 out of 22) of the participants (including representatives from small, medium, and large businesses; Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses; and all regions) demonstrated a positive interest in finding ways to attract and retain Indigenous workers. For some participants, Indigenous
workers represent an important potential workforce, notably because their population is growing fast and they live close to where forestry operations take place:

“Instead of bringing in [labour] from the Philippines, well, maybe we have a pool of labour here, right next to us.” (E3-M)

“Of course, I think there is a great potential for [recruiting Indigenous] workers because we know that the [Indigenous] population is growing more than ... the rest of Quebec.” (E15-S-I)

Secondly, some participants (7 out of 22; mostly from small and medium businesses, including one Indigenous business) had an ambivalent attitude toward hiring Indigenous workers. They demonstrated an openness for hiring Indigenous people but did not change their practices to favour the recruitment and retention of Indigenous workers. In the recruitment process, for example, they treated Indigenous candidates on the same basis as other candidates:

“We definitely are open [to recruit Indigenous workers]. When I will have applications, I will evaluate them, but on the same basis as any other application.” (E16-M)

Thirdly, only one participant (from E10-M) had no interest in hiring Indigenous workers. For him, it was a last resort when dealing with labour scarcity, partly because of negative experiences he had in the past:

“[Hiring Indigenous workers] never worked. ... In the past, before I was here, we had experiences with Indians that did not go well...the [Indigenous] employees did not show up; it created conflicts.” (E10-M)

Despite a predominantly positive discourse, participants mentioned that Indigenous people display a low level of interest in working for forestry businesses. However, they could not identify the underlying reasons for this lack of interest:

“Here at the sawmill, we are looking for workers. Priority is given to hiring First Nations. But in the past, we had a retention problem: they do not stay, they get discouraged. ... But why do they get discouraged? Very good question...” (E3-M)

3.1.2. The “indigenous advantage”

The three Indigenous businesses interviewed in this research have been most effective in hiring Indigenous workers, which comprise 40%–90% of their workforce compared with 0%–20% in non-Indigenous businesses. In terms of recruitment, Indigenous employers adopted proactive practices such as advertising job openings through the band council and using social media and community radio stations as preferred means of communication:

“I would say that Facebook is working well and [that it favours] the connection we have with the community in the development of the workforce.” (E15-S-I)

“For [job] promotion, we have a Facebook page, and that’s pretty much it. As for the rest, I know people [in the community]; I know who I should or should not talk to.” (E5-S-I)

The fact that Indigenous employers are located within the communities and benefit from an informal network also favoured recruitment of interested and available Indigenous workers. Trust was pinpointed as a critical factor by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous forestry employers but appeared easier to establish for employers that were from the communities or already established positive relationships with the communities:

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5 Quotations in French have been translated to English.
“we go through Indigenous entrepreneurs. ... Because we tried more standard 
entrepreneurs who were supposed to integrate First Nations, but it didn’t work well....People 
are more likely to go [to a business from the community] to work with self-confidence.” (E3-
M)

“[The Director of Human Resources] has already worked [in the community]. So she created 
links there....Her name was known in the community.” (E14-
M)

Six of the 19 businesses considered in this research had a form of partnership with an Indigenous 
community or an Indigenous business. Partnerships with Indigenous communities increased the 
capacity of forestry employers to recruit Indigenous workers. Partnerships can take different forms, 
including cooperation protocols, outsourcing, joint ventures, and informal partnerships. A 
cooperation protocol includes specific objectives in terms of hiring and training Indigenous workers. 
It lays the groundwork for a partnership to foster the economic development of the Indigenous 
community; the recruitment, training, and hiring of Indigenous workers; and the protection of 
ancestral lands. For example, it allowed an employer (E1-L) to address the lack of skilled workers 
by offering training to the Indigenous labour pool in collaboration with an Indigenous community:

“We have a protocol of collaboration between the business and the community …. We have 
a very strong relationship with the community …. For me, it’s important to integrate diversity 
into the workplace.” (E1-L)

Outsourcing has also been experimented with, in which outside suppliers were hired to perform 
tasks traditionally done in-house. For example, a participant from employer E3-M has been involved 
in training an Indigenous entrepreneur and developing his community-based business. The 
employer then outsourced the work to the business, creating local employment. This method was 
mentioned to be more productive, as the participant suggested that it was more difficult to integrate 
Indigenous workers into non-Indigenous businesses. Additionally, a joint venture has also been 
tested by an employer (E7-S). By strengthening the relationship with the community, it helped hire 
Indigenous employees:

“I have a partnership with the [Indigenous community] ... . Most of the Indigenous people 
that worked for us were from [the community], basically through this [joint venture]. ... 
Certainly by having this relationship with [the community], we favoured their members.” (E7-
S)

Another business (E9-M) had an informal partnership with an Indigenous entrepreneur to whom 
they rented forestry equipment and who was in turn responsible for hiring Indigenous workers from 
the community. This allowed the employer to obtain wood supply guarantees within Indigenous 
territories, an economic incentive for the business to make efforts to favour Indigenous 
employment:

“[Indigenous community members] are not on our direct payroll. They have a forestry 
business over there that hires them, but the machinery belongs to us and we rent it to them. 
... Although we lose a little money renting the machinery, it guarantees us the wood.” (E9-
M)

However, partnerships have mainly been established by medium and large businesses, suggesting 
that partnerships require human and financial resources beyond the capacity of small businesses, 
as expressed by a participant:

“[Partnerships are] always an investment in terms of money or human resources. In the 
model into which we operate, we always have to do more with less. ... It takes the will to say, 
‘We will invest money and human resources to create that [partnership].’” (E14-M)
None of the participants mentioned if there were requirements in terms of the percentage of Indigenous employees that should be hired within their partnership.

### 3.1.3. Training and skill development

The interviews showed the importance for employers to develop work-related training and skill development for Indigenous workers, as mentioned by the following participant:

> “We believe that the number one priority is… that we need to develop competency [within the Indigenous workforce].” (E3-M)

Given the dangerous nature of some forestry jobs, health and safety awareness is very important to the participants and is sought from all employers (E1-L, E3-M, E4-L, E16-M, and E17-M):

> “Health and safety is a fundamental value. We want people who are willing to respect procedures. There are certain individuals, you will tell them instructions, and as soon as you have your back turned, they will do something else.” (E1-L)

Furthermore, continuous learning capacities are needed to ensure that future workers are equipped with the right type of skills to successfully navigate through an ever-changing, technology rich work environment. Versatility, in particular, can prove to be important within the context of labour scarcity, as workers might have to frequently switch from one task to another:

> “Given the major lack of workforce, [we are looking for] people with learning abilities … with the capacity to move forward.” (E4-L)

To develop training and skill development, employers (16 out of 19; across all regions and business sizes) did not solely rely on the education system; they also developed in-house training. Mentoring and learning by example have been identified as effective ways to train Indigenous workers (E14-M and E7-S):

> “[Training needs] a lot of mentoring. We always have experienced tree planters in the teams with new planters. [Indigenous people] can learn by observation and dialogue with the more experienced guys.” (E14-M)

Other good practices were the recognition of prior learning or experience and the simultaneous pursuit of work and training. In several regions of Quebec, Professional Training Centres[^6] offer such programs (CFP Baie-James 2018; CFP Mont-Laurier 2019; CFP Pays-des-Bleuets 2017; École forestière de La Tuque 2019). The training program can be co-designed by the centre and the business and delivered by the centre on-site:

> “We recognized the hours of experience [the Indigenous workers] had, and we offered them the chance to complete the courses. The teachers came on-site at the mill.” (E15-S-I)

Forest businesses have been offering training programs to Indigenous people for a long time; however, employers have also developed practical solutions by working collaboratively with other actors in the educational network, particularly Indigenous communities. For example, an employer (E3-M) explained that his business provided training in forestry operations (e.g., road building and logging) in collaboration with a training centre. The employer provided a contract for students to carry out forestry operations in a defined area and committed to offering jobs to the Indigenous trainees upon completion of the program. The training centre assumed the training costs, and the Indigenous community (Human Resources Department) pre-advertised the positions, carried out the interviews, and selected the participants. This collaboration allowed the employer to access

[^6]: In Quebec, Professional Training Centres (Centres de formation professionnelle (CFP) provide training services for workers’ skills development and tailor-made training for businesses.
skilled workers more easily and cheaply and helped Indigenous trainees to get a job at the end of their training:

“They came to train a few groups [in the community] that allowed us to train an Indigenous entrepreneur who now works for us.” (E3-M)

What is unique here, compared with conventional approaches, is that (i) the community participated in the capacity development framework (e.g., short-term format, promotion, and recruitment) and (ii) the employer provided the Indigenous students with a salary.

3.1.4. Integration of Indigenous workers and cultural awareness

In terms of specific measures to promote the integration of Indigenous workers, most of the participating businesses (18 out of 19) had nothing in place, treating Indigenous workers the same way as non-Indigenous workers. This approach was justified by a sense of having to maintain fairness and equity among employees. A participant also mentioned that he avoids providing more benefits to Indigenous workers to prevent conflicts with other employees.

A participant from a large forestry business (E1-L) stood out by clearly indicating his business’s objective of “integrating Indigenous workers”, which was assessed through a performance evaluation. Firstly, after Indigenous employees have completed a conventional training program (health and safety, environmental standards, and human resources), they are mentored by experienced workers. Secondly, the business recognizes the potential for intercultural conflicts, creates conditions conducive to the reporting of intercultural conflicts by Indigenous employees, and explains to Indigenous workers the process to follow in case of a problem:

“what I do as [manager of] human resources, I do a little outreach to [the Indigenous employees]. To see if there are cultural clashes that Indigenous people feel. I really keep my door open. That’s what I tell them during their training. Then, I meet them one-on-one.” (E1-L)

Thirdly, the integration process includes a follow-up of Indigenous workers over the long run (e.g., regular individual meetings), which proved to be successful in improving integration and retention. However, there has been little cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous workers. Indeed, only a small proportion of the participating businesses (5 out of 19) offered training on the Indigenous historical context, values, and cultures to achieve cultural mediation. In addition, cultural awareness training was more often provided at the management level rather than at the employee level and depended on financial capacity:

“We have a presentation...to the management team. But in the past, we gave [cultural] training to our workers. They were put in a room...to show them Indigenous history... It stopped because of the forest industry crisis.” (E3-M)

3.2. Work Group factors

3.2.1. Composition of the working group

According to some participants, composition of the working group has an influence on the quality of the interactions among employees and on the work environment. They noted that not only do Indigenous people prefer working together, but also that Indigenous working groups also have the potential to improve synergy, which is observed through productivity gains:

“[Indigenous people] prefer to work with a Native person. That’s for sure. They seem to listen more and better follow the instructions.” (E11-S-I)

“The climate is very good. [Indigenous people] like that, they have their team, they are together ... they have a synergy.” (E14-M)
However, one participant offered another view of the situation that invites further investigation. He experienced increased productivity when mixing non-Indigenous and Indigenous workers within a group. According to his experience, mixed groups allow for mentoring, which has been described as effective in transferring knowledge between non-Indigenous and Indigenous employees.

### 3.2.2. Stereotypes and discrimination

When work climate was discussed, more than half of the participants (13 out of 22) reported a cordial atmosphere within their organization. Specifically, Indigenous employers did not observe any major disagreements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees.

However, some participants reported that stereotypes and discrimination still occur sporadically and underlined the need to address these issues. For example, some workers did not reveal their Indigenous origins, fearing judgement by their non-Indigenous colleagues, for example, “taxes they don’t need to pay” (E13-L). Measures to promote the integration of Indigenous workers were sometimes perceived as unfair benefits by some non-Indigenous employees. Some participants (6 out of 22) underlined the need to address the stereotypes and discrimination issues within their organization.

### 3.3. Societal factors

#### 3.3.1. Integrating the forestry work culture

Many participants mentioned that it is a challenge for Indigenous people to integrate the conventional work schedules and time management of the work culture in forestry. Participants mentioned experiencing inconsistency and tardiness in work attendance:

“[Indigenous people are] a great potential workforce. Except that we must … develop for them … a culture of North American work … the guys need to be educated on [time management], from Monday to Friday, from 7 AM to 5 PM, daily.” (E7-S)

“It’s important for people to show up for their shift, then be rigorous, diligent. Is that always perfect with First Nations? I don’t think so.” (E3-M)

From some participants’ perspectives, the work organization requires well-defined and rigorous work schedules to foster productivity. They perceived that some Indigenous workers seem to have a different relationship with time, which does not always fit with the work schedule. They expressed a need for adaptation and respect on that dimension of forestry work:

“The [Indigenous] guys were arriving at 10 AM. They went out at 2 PM. There were three in the same team: two sitting, one working.” (E2-S)

“We’re used to [working] with a clock, a time, but [Indigenous people] may be less used [to following a strict time frame]. … they have to adapt to us too.” (E10-M)

#### 3.3.2. Dealing with social problems

Several participants made a connection between the challenges they experienced as employers and social problems in some Indigenous communities. More specifically, the use of drugs and alcohol by certain individuals emerged as an issue for human resources management:

“We try [to hire] people … who are sober. That’s what you need to look good, both us as a business and them as Indigenous workers … the guys must be sober.” (E6-L)

One participant reported having put measures into place to raise employee awareness through specific organizational policies (e.g., “zero tolerance” policy for drugs and alcohol in the workplace). Other participants highlighted the complexity of managing these issues, as they extend beyond their skills as forestry managers:
“They have major social problems that are so complex to get into... It’s not in my skills. ... It’s not us that will solve the social problems in the communities.” (E3-M)

Out of the ten participants who mentioned “difficult social conditions”, nine did not know how to deal with these social issues. These difficulties sometimes ended with the dismissal or nonrecall of Indigenous employees. However, certain employers appeared to be more used to dealing with situations relating to social problems. For example, one participant (from E15-S-I) mentioned meeting with employees and offering them the resources that they needed to fix their problems (e.g., drug addiction help resources). Some participants (from E11-S-I, E14-M, and E15-S-I) emphasized the need for tolerance regarding absenteeism and lower productivity, with the goal of helping Indigenous employees persevere and break the vicious circle of social issues:

“when you arrive in a pool of labour where they are caught with different social issues, it’s difficult to recruit these people. You need to have a different understanding, a patience, then try innovative ways to integrate them and break the circle.” (E15-S-I)

3.3.3. Filling the education gap
In the forestry sector, the level of education and experience sought by employers depends on the types of jobs to be filled, especially considering the variety of forestry operations (e.g., silviculture, logging, road building, and timber hauling), as well as forest products (e.g., wood, pulp and paper, and value-added products). Most participants acknowledged that, in general, there is a gap between the formal apprenticeship and work experience that employers seek and the reality of the low level of completed education of the Indigenous workforce:

“Certainly, I’m going to push for Indigenous people, but it’s the [Indigenous peoples’] lack of skills, that’s the first thing [to be solved].” (E8-S)

However, two Indigenous employers (E11-S-I and E15-S-I) were disposed to consider requirements other than diplomas, depending on the candidates’ experiences:

“We don’t necessarily ask for a secondary 5. We will go as low as secondary 3. Even some individuals that are mature workers and stuff like that, we don’t really look at that too much.” (E11-S-I)

4. Discussion
The forestry sector in Quebec is characterized by a low level of diversity in terms of human resources (Beaudry 2015; Legendre 2005; Sarathy and Casanova 2008). Yet, several drivers of change are now reshaping the Canadian economy, including modifications of legal and political frameworks, additional social responsibilities expected from employers, and increased control of natural resources by Indigenous people (Anderson 1997; Beaudoin et al. 2015; Teilbaum 2015). The dominant culture in the forestry sector is changing (Natcher 2008), raising challenges for forestry employers in Quebec attempting to create an environment conducive to the recruitment, integration, and retention of Indigenous workers.

Among the 19 forestry businesses that participated in this research, Indigenous-owned businesses had, by far, the highest percentage of Indigenous workers. Indeed, Indigenous-owned forestry businesses are proactive in implementing diversity management practices that facilitate the recruitment, integration, and retention of Indigenous workers (Théberge et al. 2018) and thus represent an efficient way to create jobs in Indigenous communities (Beaudoin et al. 2009, 2015). Partnerships between forestry businesses and Indigenous communities also stood out positively as enhancing Indigenous hiring — although to a lesser degree than Indigenous-owned businesses — a finding that is in line with previous research (Jose 2013; Théberge et al. 2018). However, some partnerships appear more effective than others. According to a study of the Canadian forestry industry by Hickey and Nelson (2005), different partnership structures (e.g., contracting services, 7

7 In Quebec, secondary 5 corresponds to a high school diploma, generally obtained at the age of 16 years old. Secondary 3 is generally obtained at the age of 14 years old.
cooperatives, cooperation agreements, and joint ventures) are more or less effective in attracting, integrating, and retaining Indigenous workers. Research suggests the need to further investigate the development level of hiring practices (Théberge et al. 2018).

Indigenous employers and partnerships appear to create an environment of trust and cultural safety (organizational factor), which facilitates the recruitment and retention of Indigenous workers (Cameron and Cutean 2017; Jose 2013; Perkins and Brown 2010). Previous research has indeed emphasized the need for a culturally relevant and safe working environment for Indigenous people (DeVerteuil and Wilson 2010; Hutchins et al. 2009; Julien and Brant 2017, p. 176; Lévesque 2015; Williams 1999).

The narrative of the forestry employers displayed a whole array of interests in the Indigenous workforce and a will to implement diversity management practices (e.g., mentoring, cultural training, and partnerships). Facing challenges to recruit qualified and well-trained Indigenous workers, employers have put into place tailored training programs such as mentoring, coaching from experienced employees, on-the-job teaching, observation, and experimentation (Burgess and Dyer 2009; Ewing et al. 2017; Hunter and Gray 2017; McCalmant et al. 2009; Scerra 2012). Such techniques have been identified as factors in both encouraging the participation of the Indigenous workers in the mining sector (Caron et al. 2019) and having a positive effect on the performance of Indigenous students (Burgess and Dyer 2009; Crooks et al. 2017; Munns et al. 2016; Pidgeon et al. 2014). This is important, as previous research highlighted that a major barrier to recruiting, integrating, and retaining Indigenous workers is their level of education and qualification (Affaires autochtones et du Nord Canada (AADNC) 2003; Brown and Fraehlich 2012; Ciceri and Scott 2006; Gröschl 2003; Howard et al. 2012, p. 12; Jose 2013; Lamontagne 2004; Sloan and Oliver 2009). Burgess and Dyer (2009, p. 468) concluded that “culturally sensitive formal mentoring is seen as a major component to ensuring positive Indigenous employment outcomes”. According to Gröschl (2003, p. 98), “organizations need to shift their focus from a short-term hiring plan towards a more long-term strategy that includes potential employees’ pre-employment training and their education. This requires strong external links and partnerships with a wide range of organizations such as academic institutions and employment agencies”.

However, some forest employers displayed what seemed to be double-talk, sometimes reproducing attitudes of cultural superiority, as pointed out by Molander (2014). For example, some employers expressed the need to develop the “forestry work culture” among Indigenous workers. In fact, only recently have forestry employers begun to put into place practices to increase the proportion of Indigenous employees within their organizations. Most forestry businesses are characterized by a low level of development in terms of cultural management practices (Théberge et al. 2018). In the present study, nearly 30% of the employers had a no-differentiation approach to the recruitment process, and only a few had set up cultural training programs. This finding also echoes the results of Théberge et al. (2018) and Blackman (2017), who determined that little was done to adapt practices in terms of flexibility, advantages, training, and skill development to better meet the needs of Indigenous employees. Issues related to recruitment and integration also come through more strongly compared with retention issues, suggesting a need for further investigation.

There is a gap between the expectations of forestry employers (e.g., time, performance, and education level) and the realities of some Indigenous workers (e.g., low level of schooling and socioeconomic issues). The Conference Board of Canada (2019, p. vi) mentioned that “many challenges [in terms of recruiting, integrating, and maintaining Indigenous workers] come down to a lack of understanding [between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people]” and suggested that conventional behaviours and practices are often inadequate with Indigenous workers. Results from the present study show that implementing practices such as cultural training and awareness-raising among all employees and business leaders (organizational factor) is an effective way to break down myths and prejudices against Indigenous people (work group factors). Other researchers have suggested that these types of training have positive impacts on the work climate (Caron et al. 2019; Parmenter and Trigger 2018) and reduce discrimination within the labour market (Braden 2011; Duhaime 1991), whereas ignorance and lack of respect of Indigenous cultures are counterproductive (Bruce and Marlin 2012; Julien and Brant 2017, p. 173; Mills 2011).

Some employers have suggested that it might be more efficient to create homogenous Indigenous work groups. This raises a fundamental question: Is diversity management about creating isolated homogeneous work groups or about making the most of diversity within work
groups? Creating a work climate conducive to inclusion requires practices that promote a sense of belonging and satisfaction of identity concerns (Guillaume et al. 2014; Shore et al. 2011). Employers need to be proactive in establishing conditions that facilitate acclimatization of Indigenous peoples within organizations (Gröschl 2003; Shore et al. 2011).

It is recognized that Indigenous people often face socioeconomic and educational inequities that limit their capacity to enter the labour market (AADNC 2003; Braden 2011; Brown and Fraehlich 2012; Ciceri and Scott 2006; Gröschl 2003; Howard et al. 2012; Jose 2013; Lamontagne 2004; Sloan and Oliver 2009), and some of the concerns expressed in the present study by employers demonstrate this limitation. Employers felt they did not have the necessary tools to deal with such complex issues, and few of them have implemented countermeasures, highlighting the need for better support. Guillaume et al. (2014) suggested that antidiscrimination legislation could favour fairer treatment of individuals regarding access to jobs, training, and education; promotion to higher positions within the labour market; and improvement of working conditions. Other authors have also mentioned the role of government in eliminating systemic discrimination against Indigenous people (Agocs 2002; Biddle et al. 2013; Brown and Fraehlich 2012). Caron et al. (2019) found that increasing the proportion of Indigenous workers in the mining sector was only possible when hiring Indigenous employees was mandatory (e.g., to respect modern treaties or Impact and Benefit Agreements). No mandatory requirements to hire Indigenous people exist in the Quebec forestry sector, and forest certification by nongovernmental standard organizations has not yet proved to deliver on First Nation issues (Teitelbaum and Wyatt 2013). Nevertheless, new partnerships between forestry businesses and Indigenous communities have been motivated by an increase in standing timber volumes granted to Indigenous communities in recent years (MFFP 2014; National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA) 2015).

The Diversity Management Model in Organizations (Guillaume et al. 2014) is built on the importance of employer efforts to integrate people from different cultures into one dominant organizational culture. Yet, Indigenous people are not necessarily interested in becoming part of another culture. Mills (2011) concludes that Western business values are often imposed on Indigenous workers and fail to address their needs for collective empowerment. In other words, integrating diversity might not be sufficient, and employers should consider practices favouring the coexistence of cultures. The results presented in this study evoke “multi-actor approaches”, including outsourcing to Indigenous businesses and collaborating with Indigenous communities. This research provides useful information to improve the design of interventions. However, although only the perceptions of the employers were documented, further investigation into the perceptions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers are needed to complete the portrait.

Conclusion
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015, p. 10) made the following call to action:

“Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.”

The forestry employers who took part in this study shared their experiences concerning the management of Indigenous diversity in their organizations. Their narrative suggests that most employers see the potential of the Indigenous workforce to address the labour shortage and that practices are being implemented to increase recruitment, integration, and retention. However, it appears that the current design of interventions is open to criticism. Many employers are still in the early awareness stages and still exhibit signs of cultural hegemony. Workplaces need to provide opportunities for cross-cultural training. In addition, partnerships should be strengthened among educational institutions, forestry businesses, and Indigenous communities.

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