

Leadership Revolution in New Brunswick
A province-wide initiative to enhance leadership capacity and excellence

By Françoise Morissette, Faculty and Fellow, IRC
Fellow, Wallace McCain Institute

Turning Point

In 2007, a variety of stakeholders interested in the viability and success of their province, got together to create sustainable economic renewal and prosperity (visit www.fullsailsummit.com for more details).

Faced with massive emigration, erosion of their natural resource-based economy, and poor academic standings, New Brunswick was ready for change. “Maritime provinces are at a crossroads”, commented Donald Savoie in the Telegraph Journal on May 7, 2007; “We can sit by, make political noises about the state of our economy and see our population continue to drift away, or we can define an ambitious and overriding goal and pursue it with all the energy that we can muster.”

Self sufficiency in 20 years was chosen as the overriding vision, and three major strategies were selected to achieve it:

1. Restructure natural resource-based businesses according to long term stewardship, instead of short term exploitation
2. Attract businesses from outside the province, by providing tax incentives, skilled workers, a welcoming climate and sufficient infrastructures
3. Help more entrepreneurs succeed at building large, solid businesses.

Entrepreneurship was picked as the centerpiece for obvious reasons: Transformation of natural resource-based businesses will take a long time and a lot of experimentation. Imported businesses don't have local roots, and therefore no loyalty to the host province: they tend to move according to market conditions. However, entrepreneurs, born and raised in New Brunswick, are attached to their home and have a stake in its future. By enhancing entrepreneurial support and boosting leadership capacity, the province can build a robust economy, independent of outside decision-makers and finite natural resources.

Wise Strategies

To succeed with the entrepreneurial scenario, meant borrowing approaches from the world of sports, named “hothouse” and “pipeline”:

Hothouse strategies are focused on the short term, and concerned with issues like: who can compete in the next Olympic Games and how to get them ready? For instance, after Canada's

poor performance at Athens in 2004 (only 12 medals), the Canadian Olympic Committee created *Own the Podium*, a program designed to better select and develop medal-material athletes and align resources behind them. As a result, Canada increased its medal count at the 2006 Turino Games to 24.

Pipeline strategies are focused on the long term, and concerned with issues like: increasing fitness levels in the overall population, stimulating widespread interest in sports, and building competitive capacity over time. For instance, initiatives like PARTICIPACTION and programs aimed at different age groups and abilities, allow the average Canadian to become more active and fit.

Likewise, broadly available sports programs, enable young people to engage in sports and in time, superior talent emerges. For instance, Canada's consistent success in hockey depends on the strength of our pipeline. From Peewees to the NHL, hockey talent is scouted, nurtured, developed and distributed.

The same logic applies to leadership excellence and development. *Hothouse* approaches such as succession planning, groom the next crop of executives. *Pipeline* strategies such as leadership education in schools, groom the next generation of leaders.

Hothouse

New Brunswick decided to hothouse high potential entrepreneurs running businesses established 5-8 years ago, and ready to "bust out and go big". A province-wide needs analysis was conducted and entrepreneurs identified 4 areas where assistance is needed: financing, networking, innovation and education. A roundtable was held in February 2008 to develop a set of concrete recommendations in each of these areas.

In education, business man and philanthropist Wallace McCain donated funds to create an Institute mandated to "help entrepreneurs develop the understanding, tools and relationships needed to grow their businesses, creating new opportunities for economic and social progress across New Brunswick" (www.wallacemccaininstitute.com)

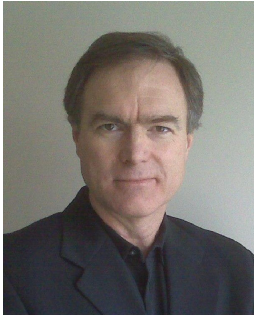


Dr. Nancy Mathis, Executive Director, describes the role of this pioneer organization: "The Institute creates an environment where entrepreneurs develop a network of likeminded peers and a deeper understanding of the keys to successful entrepreneurship. Participants work closely with each other and top business icons, drawing inspiration and encouragement. A small, exceptional group of high potentials is invited each year to the challenging program where insights are exchanged and experiences are shared. Our motto is: *Bridging entrepreneurial leaders.*"

Fifteen high potential entrepreneurs were selected as the first cohort, which began in July 2008. Spread over a year, the curriculum includes topics like Change and Innovation, Strategic Planning, Building and Managing human capital etc...Participants meet once a month and benefit from the

expertise of a wide range of professionals, academics and executives from all over the country, including Roger Favero, Vice-President Technologies at American Express.

Besides education, other developmental and support strategies are also being used. For instance, members of the New Brunswick Business Council have volunteered to serve as mentors in an effort to “support entrepreneurial greatness” in the province. In a June 20, 2007 press release, the Council stated: “We need to connect individual business experience by transforming mentoring into a deliberate practice.” Cohort members highly value the advice, connections and opportunities resulting from these mentoring sessions.



Moreover, Paul Johnson, CEO, Quantum 5X Systems from London, Ont. has been named the Ted Rogers Executive in Residence for the Wallace McCain Institute. Participants can draw from his wisdom and experience on a continuous and personal basis. “I am proud to be part of this landmark initiative. The most important contribution I can make now is leaving behind a legacy of leaders. I take great satisfaction in accelerating others’ learning through transferring my skills and experience. As well, I learn through these interactions and sharpen my own leadership skills” declared Mr. Johnson.

Pipeline

The province is also determined to build a “leadership pipeline” by totally revamping the curriculum from elementary school to university, injecting a heavy dose of entrepreneurial and leadership components, as well as beefing up computer and business literacy.

This educational strategy will be complemented by business start up competitions at the elementary level, entrepreneurship boot camps at the secondary level, and university incubation labs to help entrepreneurs test and fine tune their ideas.

Students will also be exposed to entrepreneur role models and mentors in schools. Currently, pilots are being conducted in elementary schools: students start businesses with a little budget, and make it prosper with skills they learn, such as budgeting in math classes, and marketing in English classes. So far, \$100.00 investments are often turned into \$1000.00!

Conclusion

This historic initiative is a stellar example of large scale systems thinking. For instance, a roundtable was held in November 2008 to align the various stakeholders. At this event, stakeholders mapped out the leadership development system in the province and improved linkages and connectivity.