

## **Building Leadership Capacity, Business Judgement**

*THE MORE BUSINESS LEADERS WE TOUCH, THE MORE ROBUST THOSE BUSINESSES BECOME.*

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Paul Johnson is passionate about building leadership capacity and business judgment. While he resides in London, Ont., he has chosen to ramp up his time in our region over the last 12 years to the point that he now spends roughly 50 per cent of his time in New Brunswick.



Paul Johnson is a Partner & Founder of Pivotal Input, Executive-in Residence for the Wallace McCain Institute and the Chairman & CEO of Quantum 5X Systems Inc.  
(photo: Cindy Wilson/Telegraph Journal)

Johnson has two roles – the first as the Ted and Loretta Rogers executive-in-residence at the Wallace McCain Institute for Business Leadership at University of New Brunswick and the second as a partner in the boutique consulting firm Pivotal Input.

He brings a unique set of experiences to these roles, including his work as CEO of several large manufacturing companies.

This corporate background, along with an MBA from Harvard Business School and seven years as a venture capitalist, equip him to be among a short list of the most valued resources in New Brunswick.

As a member of the WMI's Entrepreneurial Leadership Program, I have witnessed first-hand Johnson's invaluable mentorship.

I began our interview by asking how he became involved with the Wallace McCain Institute.

**A:** I was invited to join the Wallace McCain Institute's team early in the design of the institute's programs in 2007. My skill set and background complemented the talents of the executive director, Nancy Mathis, and we had worked together for seven years previously. The programming at the institute is focused around peer groups and I was able to support Nancy as she combined various program models into what suited the region. Because I had been, and continue to be, a member of the world's most renowned CEO peer group YPO/ WPO, I understood the unique way that this form of experiential learning was ideal for helping business leaders to accelerate the development of their business judgment.

**Q:** Having worked with leaders throughout the world, what is unique about entrepreneurs in the Greater Atlantic Area, or GAA?

**A:** The Greater Atlantic Area, but specifically New Brunswick, has a tremendous amount of interconnectivity. Anyone who reaches out can typically get to anyone else in two steps. This includes the most significant business icons. These icons are even easier to reach for the institute's members. They are unbelievably generous with their time and their experiences as session speakers, mentors and sponsors. I have never seen a place that has this combination of support and accessibility from the most prominent and inspirational leaders.

**Q:** What contributions does the WMI make to entrepreneurial leadership in our region?

**A:** We offer a couple of important opportunities for entrepreneurs. Firstly, there is a connection to a vibrant peer group of like-minded CEOs. Secondly, there is an opportunity to accelerate the development of sound business judgment. We “take the alone away” by providing highly confidential group settings, where peers become each other's trusted board of advisers. These two things are valued so much that several groups have committed to meet at least quarterly for the rest of their lives.

**Q:** In your opinion, what are the biggest opportunities for business leaders in the GAA?

**A:** Many of the businesses in the region could benefit from a higher degree of collaboration. Rather than competing between companies or cities or provinces, we need to combine resources and compete on a global scale. With a belief in our capabilities and with an environment of trust, this has a higher probability of success.

**Q:** What are the biggest obstacles business leaders in the GAA need to overcome?

**A:** The primary obstacle is their own self-opinion of where they rank. We work with many passionate and capable leaders with robust business opportunities. In the supportive business environment we introduce them to, they begin to build trust in themselves. With this confidence, they become prepared for today's and tomorrow's challenges. A second obstacle is the ability to embrace challenges and even failure. Some of the most capable founders end up in a business that is not viable. The best outcome is to help them learn from the experience. The goal is to get them get back on their feet and at the helm of the next opportunity – a business with a sustainable competitive advantage.

**Q:** What are the best practices and hallmarks of a great leader?

**A:** The best business leaders seek input from external resources and filter it through a lens of their business judgment. They refine their thinking to be crystal clear and concise. They then communicate their message consistently to the relevant audiences. The groups I work with hear this mantra of mine often because I practise what I preach: clear, concise, consistent.

**Q:** What is the impact of the Wallace McCain Institute?

**A:** Wallace McCain Institute is gaining critical mass throughout the region. It has worked with over 150 business leaders through its programs. Participants will attest that this has dramatically changed the way they lead their business and in fact it has changed their lives for the better.

**Q:** What challenges exist as you grow leadership capacity and business judgment in what you do?

**A:** Our challenge is how to scale from our small elite groups without losing the intimacy and impact for each member. But that is what must happen. The more business leaders we touch, the more robust those businesses become and the more prosperous the region will be. The ultimate goal is to make this the best place in Canada to start and grow a company.

**Q:** From your perspective, what does the (institute) offer entrepreneurial leaders that they cannot find anywhere else?

**A:** The Wallace McCain Institute creates a rare environment within its peer groups for business leaders, including CEOs, founders, senior managers, 2iCs and members of family businesses. The rarity is the ability for these leaders to share their challenges, opportunities and successes and to gain from the same things being shared by others. All of this occurs in a totally confidential forum that gets beyond “cocktail talk” to the real drivers in a business. Members have time to go deep and get insights on the most critical issues they face.

**Q:** If an entrepreneur is reading this and considering getting involved with the WMI, how can they learn more?

**A:** Any business leader that is serious about the growth of not only their business, but themselves, should look at our website at [WallaceMcCainInstitute.com](http://WallaceMcCainInstitute.com). The Entrepreneurial Leaders Program is currently accepting applications until March 31 for its next cohort of the top 15 highest growth potential entrepreneurs in the GAA. Anyone interested in this should watch the video on the home page and connect with Nancy Mathis through her contact info on the website.

**Q:** What is Pivotal Input?

**A:** The institute typically works with CEOs in group settings with other CEOs. In some cases, a CEO wants to bring support back to their company through workshops, strategic planning or executive mentoring. That is why Pivotal Input was established. The slogan is “Partners in critical thinking” and that sums it up well. We have had the privilege to work with several of New Brunswick’s leading companies to establish solid strategies to obtain their vision of the future.

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