

Innovation 2.0

Entrepreneurship, Diversity, and Workforce Development: Fostering an Innovative, Collaborative and Forward-Thinking Economic Landscape

Final Report

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Background to the Conference

Presented jointly by the Association of New Canadians, the Navigate Entrepreneurship Centre and the CNA Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre at CNA, Innovation 2.0 Conference explored how entrepreneurship, diversity and workforce development can foster an innovative, collaborative and forward-thinking economic landscape in Newfoundland and Labrador. The goal was to foster conversations in each of these three areas and encourage broader and more sustained conversations, collaborations and partnerships after the event.

The day-long event was hosted by Grenfell Campus, Memorial University, on May 14, 2018. Participants were encouraged to share perspectives and pose questions during roundtable discussions, after the presentations, fire-side chat interview panel, and keynote address.

In Attendance

Sixty-five people registered and participated in the event from multiple sectors including faculty, staff and students from Grenfell Campus and the College of the North Atlantic, industry representatives, as well as community organizations, government, and training and employment service providers. Attendees were encouraged to share thoughts and ideas online using #InnovationNL.



Conversation 1: Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation



Conversation 1: *New Centre for Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation*

Presenters: Darren Pelley (General Manager, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Ltd.(CBPPL)), Dr. Kelly Vodden (Associate Vice-President, Research and Graduate Studies, Grenfell Campus)

Moderator: Dr. Maria Kilfoil (Manager, Navigate Makerspace)

Presentations

Conversation 1 was presented by Grenfell Campus and the Navigate Entrepreneurship Centre. Dr. Kelly Vodden gave an overview of research projects and activities at Grenfell Campus that will help foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in Corner Brook and the western region of the province. She focused on Grenfell's initiatives in agriculture, including a proposal for the development of a food and agriculture hub; entrepreneurship, including the growing role of the Navigate Entrepreneurship Centre; and innovation through the development of the Innovation Centre (Makerspace and Incubator) in partnership with the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) and Corner Brook Pulp and Paper (CBPPL).

Vice President and General Manager Darren Pelley highlighted the role innovation will continue to play at CBPPL. He highlighted current and future prospects for CBPPL, including current economic challenges facing the company. These included trade relations with the United States and declining newsprint markets. CBPPL has recognized the importance of supporting a culture of innovation in securing the future of CBPPL as well as in supporting sustainable development in the western region. He pointed to the planned Innovation Centre as a space that will bring ideas together and accelerate their development. He felt collaboration with Grenfell Campus and CNA will assist in reducing costs, the development new revenue streams for CBPPL, and providing effective and efficient employee training. In turn, strengthening CBPPL will help provide local employment opportunities, benefiting Corner Brook and the western region of the province.

Discussion

Three questions were posed to Conference partici-

pants as part of the moderated discussion session that followed the presentations. The questions sought to identify what role Navigate's new Innovation Centre in Corner Brook would play in promoting entrepreneurship in Newfoundland and Labrador:

1. What impact(s) would you like to see from an Innovation Centre? What role can the Innovation Centre play to help your organization succeed?
2. What would you like to see in an Innovation Centre that supports the regional economy (e.g. physical infrastructure, programing, access)?
3. What role can you play to help the Innovation Centre succeed?

The majority of conference participants felt that the Innovation Centre should be an open-access space where any individual with an idea could find assistance in developing that idea into a business—a place for discussion, mentorship, practicing pitching, prototyping, resource access and networking with other entrepreneurs. It was felt that the Innovation Centre could act as a space for recruitment and as a cross-cultural product and service hub (for new immigrants, for instance), potentially with international links. In addition, the Innovation Centre could act as a resource for new and existing businesses in the region, allowing them to learn new skills and find support/advice. Many participants felt that the key role of the Innovation Centre should be to bring people together through public outreach and collaborative activities, including groups that might be excluded from discussions normally or that might be harder to engage.

In terms of the regional economy, participants wanted to see the Innovation Centre support the technology sector, tourism, modernization of government practices, and networking. It was felt that the space should be accessible in terms of its physical structure and its hours of operation. Conference participants also wanted to see technology and related amenities that are fully accessible to the public including: charging stations, white boards/smart boards, co-working spaces, social media, and software to assist businesses (e.g. metrics). The Innovation Centre was envisioned overall as an open-access, transdisciplinary space for experiential learning and collaborative action.

Finally, participants felt that they could help the Innovation Centre succeed by: volunteering at the centre; assisting with marketing and research; facilitating partnerships (i.e. with libraries); acting as mentors for new entrepreneurs; attending networking events held at the Centre; organizing workshops; encouraging groups and individuals to use the space; and providing financial support.

Conversation 2: *The Power of Cultural Diversity*

Keynote Speaker: Emily Brennan (Marketing Manager, Alongside, Moncton New Brunswick)

Moderator: Dr. Billy Newell (Manager, Navigate Incubator)

Keynote Address

Conversation 2 was presented by the Association for New Canadians. Delivered by Emily Brennan, Marketing Manager at the Moncton-based hiring software company Alongside, the keynote address focused on the concept of Diversity and Inclusion (DBI).

Brennan suggested that, inasmuch as it can impact business success by promoting employee engagement and improving financial performance, DBI has become an imperative for firms looking to compete in the global technology industry. However, according to Brennan, two-thirds of Canadian organizations do not dedicate full-time resources to DBI functions, and most Canadian organizations have yet to link DBI to their own strategic objectives. Similarly, some organizations continue to view DBI strictly in terms of meeting quotas, rather than maintaining flexible targets that can be leveraged to improve employee engagement and productivity.

Brennan concluded by arguing that implementing effective DBI requires intentionality, and she encouraged attendees to take responsibility for promoting it within their own organizations.

Question and Answer Session

Attendees were given an opportunity to pose questions to the presenter, both in person and online at [slido.com](https://www.slido.com). Participants had the option of up-voting questions that were submitted online.

Many participants asked questions related to how DBI could be implemented in local contexts. For example, can a greater focus on DBI help to encourage international students and other newcomers to stay in the province? And if so, how can business leaders be encouraged to adopt DBI policies? Brennan suggested that “making the business case” for DBI, and proposing a trial period for businesses that are new to it, could help promote DBI among the local business community. Brennan also suggested that linking DBI to retention rates of new employees in particular, and newcomers to the province more generally, might help to make such a business case more persuasive.

Some participants shared their own experiences and feelings of exclusion in the workplace. Many saw DBI as an important set of tools that businesses can use to engage in values-based recruiting, as opposed to simply matching skills to open positions, and to help identify and support the strengths of their existing employees. Many conference participants expressed the view that there is a need to humanize the hiring process and to engage more deeply with employees after they are hired. Brennan suggested that doing so can create new opportunities for businesses, such as developing a more diverse workforce over time that can then draw on a wider range of skills and experiences to solve business problems in new and creative ways. In this sense, innovating the hiring process may be the key to retaining a more diverse workforce and promoting higher levels of overall innovation in the provincial workforce.



Conversation 3: *Innovation in Workforce Development*

Panelists: Juanita Ford (Chief Operating Officer, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador), Keith Goulding (Band Manager, Qalipu First Nation), Darren Pelley (General Manager, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Ltd.), Emily Brennan (Marketing Manager, Alongside)

Fireside Chat Interviewer: Heidi Staeben-Simmons (Director of Public Affairs, College of the North Atlantic)

Roundtables Facilitator: Carole Spicer (Spicer Facilitation & Learning)

Fireside Chat

Conversation 3 was hosted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre at CNA. Panelists responded to a series of questions from Fireside Chat Interviewer, Heidi Staeben-Simmons, reflecting on challenges facing their businesses, including recruitment and retention of their current and future workforces, upskilling and out-migration. They also discussed opportunities for their organizations. Panelists agreed that innovation in technology, but also in forming partnerships and networks, would be significant in sustaining their businesses and organizations into the future. This included supporting creativity among staff members, finding new opportunities in line with the core mission of their business, internalizing diversity and inclusion, building partnerships with community, academic, and other industry partners, and using technology (e.g. social media) to promote their businesses.

Discussion

A moderated discussion followed the panel discussion. Participants were asked to reflect on and discuss in a roundtable setting the following questions, followed by report back of themes by Spicer.

1. What, if any, problems are you experiencing or are you aware of within your industry when it comes to recruiting, retaining, and/or upskilling your current workforce?
2. Addressing these problems means you have to be innovative when it comes to solutions. Tell us about

initiatives or programs that you have tried/ experimented with that work or initiatives or programs others have tried that worked.

3. What recommendations would you like to share today that would help address your company's or organization's current and future workforce development needs?

In terms of recruiting, retaining, and/or upskilling, participants noted the following challenges: attracting an experienced workforce; retaining young employees; job creation in rural and remote communities; skills matching; wage pressures with skilled jobs outside Newfoundland and Labrador (e.g. Alberta); lack of succession planning; adapting to technological changes; and red tape and bureaucracy.

Participants indicated they have had success in being innovative through: partnerships with academic institutions; federal and provincial job training grants; informal and formal networking; job sharing/reducing hours for aging employees; diversity and inclusion; developing the talent of employees; internationalization; and offering flexibility to employees (e.g. hours). Conference participants also indicated that the following did not work in terms of workforce development: posting jobs without including salary; micro-managing; and fear of changing practices.

Finally, participants felt that to address current and future workforce development needs, the following should be addressed: improving work culture (including diversity, training, flexibility); succession planning; growing networks; improving hiring practices (e.g. consider values-based recruiting); encouraging internships; using e-learning; embracing new technologies; improving communication in the workplace and between businesses/sectors; encouraging multi-sectoral collaboration; embracing immigration; and addressing barriers in the workplace (e.g. language, physical barriers, etc.).



Conversation 3: Innovation in Workforce Development

Innovation 2.0

Conference Summary

Innovation 2.0 brought together academic, non-profit, business and industry representatives to discuss how entrepreneurship, diversity, and workforce development, could foster an innovation, collaborative, and forward-thinking economic landscape in NL. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss in roundtables and pose questions over the course of three targeted conversations: 1. Centre for Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation; 2. The Power of Cultural Diversity; and 3. Innovation in Workforce Development.

The conference generated dialogue about innovation in workforces in terms of technology, but also in the human aspect of business growth—promoting diversity in the workplace, value-based hiring versus skills matching, and more. Discussions identified key chal-

lenges facing businesses and industries in Corner Brook, and Newfoundland and Labrador more broadly, including retention of skilled labour, an aging demographic, and youth outmigration. Opportunities and best practices from which attendees might share and learn were also identified, including use the future Innovation Centre in Corner Brook, immigration, DBI, and workforce innovation. Participants also stressed the importance of building networks, multi-sectoral collaboration, and communication in pursuit of innovation.

Overall, the conference identified innovation as a complex and collaborative process by which businesses may seek to be successful. For NL, Innovation 2.0 includes encouraging entrepreneurship, diversity, and innovative workforce development, including innovative recruitment, retention and re-skilling tools, processes and practices.

Media Coverage

Social Media Activity:

Participants were highly engaged on social media. NLWIC created their social media channels the night before the event and their top post was seen 2,224 times.

Tweet Activity																			
	<table><tr><td>Impressions</td><td>2,224</td></tr><tr><td>Total engagements</td><td>84</td></tr><tr><td>Media engagements</td><td>44</td></tr><tr><td>Likes</td><td>10</td></tr><tr><td>Detail expands</td><td>10</td></tr><tr><td>Retweets</td><td>8</td></tr><tr><td>Link clicks</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>Hashtag clicks</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>Profile clicks</td><td>4</td></tr></table>	Impressions	2,224	Total engagements	84	Media engagements	44	Likes	10	Detail expands	10	Retweets	8	Link clicks	4	Hashtag clicks	4	Profile clicks	4
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Other Media Coverage:

Western Star: <http://www.thewesternstar.com/news/local/marketing-manager-tells-corner-brook-conference-there-are-innovative-ways-to-hire-and-manage-human-resources-210185/>

NTV: <http://ntv.ca/corner-brook-innovation-conference-talks-diversification/>

Images

Images can be found on the @NLWIC Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pg/NLWIC/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1777619072276926

Video

Stay tuned. We will let you know when the Conference video goes online.

Acknowledgements:

