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NovaKnowledge is the best source of information about the knowledge economy in Nova Scotia. Through its projects, Nova Scotians can tap into knowledge economy news, expertise and contacts.

It is the only not-for-profit organization of its kind in Canada. With a membership drawn from industry, government and education, *NovaKnowledge* provides a wide range of perspectives.

NovaKnowledge Mission

NovaKnowledge promotes the development of a flourishing, sustainable, knowledge economy that offers a good quality of life for all Nova Scotians.

A knowledge economy is an export-oriented economy based on the addition of knowledge, creativity and technology to products and services.

2001

MIKE.

Millennium Issues for the Knowledge Economy



For years, organizations in Nova Scotia benefited from a surplus labour market. An increase in global competition for human resources, migration patterns, and demographic shifts indicate that the era of surplus labour is over. The institutions that support Nova Scotian society—universities, healthcare and government—already feel the impact.

Today Nova Scotia is on the brink of great economic opportunities, but will we have the right people at the right time to realize them?

This spring, *NovaKnowledge* engaged leaders in education, business, government, and the community in three public debates on human resources. Leaders examined three topics: ‘The looming skills crisis—

is NS seizing the opportunities or fumbling the ball? Competing globally—if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys; and Good companies, good jobs—do we have them?’

In some instances these questions provoked very different opinions, while at other times consensus emerged. Yet everyone clearly agreed that we must act now.

The following pages represent the points of consensus brought forward by participants at the debates.



Chris Hornberger, Chair of the MIKE Committee and Partner with Lawrence & Milley Consultants Inc., challenges MIKE participants to take action within their organizations.

Presented by:

Human Resources in the GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE

Small economies, like in Atlantic Canada, have particular human resource challenges. Attracting and retaining people is more difficult because employment opportunities are less diverse and pay levels tend to be lower. There are few large companies able to hire and train recent graduates.

Yet for many, Nova Scotia is a very attractive place to work and live. Our quality of life and innovative companies combine to make up a total package that can be competitive nationally and globally.

Self-confidence and a positive attitude are critical for our success

There are excellent success stories and opportunities in our province, but we tend not to publicize them. This lack of self-promotion leads to the perception that there are few good jobs or good companies in Nova Scotia.

Our best private sector employers are national leaders

An increasing number of our private sector knowledge companies compete internationally. One way they maintain their competitiveness is by developing leading edge human resources practices.

Good opportunities include more than compensation

Creative and challenging work, opportunities for training and advancement, and quality of life are as important as compensation. Investing in employees and creating a continuous learning environment are key to attracting and retaining a workforce in the knowledge economy.



Colin Dodds, President of Saint Mary's University, says it isn't just the pay, it's the total package that attracts people to the region.

A cluster of HR issues threatens our policy, healthcare and education environments

Our public sector has been caught in downsize mode and many workers are 45 years or older and moving towards retirement. Young workers have not been hired in adequate numbers to address the looming gap in talent and knowledge. In addition, the public sector is a less attractive career choice because wages are not usually competitive.

The university sector faces a similar human resource crisis as its workforce ages and international demand for professors expands. Nova Scotia has long been proud of its status as Canada's 'education province', but if professors are not offered competitive compensation and research resources, there will be shortages.

The public sector's ability to attract good leadership will have a positive impact on our entire society.

Our supply of human resources is unbalanced

Our knowledge companies enjoy a good supply of well-educated employees, but technical specialists are harder to find, particularly for small companies. There are also skills shortages in specific areas like oil and gas. For too long Nova Scotia has not invested sufficiently in technical education. Although there are many universities in Nova Scotia, we have the smallest community college system per capita and one of the smallest engineering schools in Canada.

Seizing the Opportunities


Nova Scotia can compete for human resources, but there are urgent issues that must be addressed. The following recommendations were brought forward at the debates.

Systemic issues

- = A system to measure progress on human resource issues on an ongoing basis would better equip us to dispel myths and determine what actions to take.
- = More flexibility throughout the education and training systems would enable individuals to move more easily between the workplace and educational institutions, among different institutions, and from one occupation to another.
- = More bursaries and creative pay-back programs would help people pay for education and develop skills.

Competing globally

- = Employers must make continuous learning a priority and provide opportunities for learning, pathways for employee advancement and promotion from within. Secondment, job-sharing, and job rotation are interesting alternatives to traditional training.



Malcolm Fraser, President of e-plicity, says he has no problem finding the IT talent he needs in Nova Scotia.

Mario DeMello, Principal of DDA Computer Consultants Ltd., urges companies to be more willing to hire recent graduates because they quickly become valuable.



DIGITAL ECONOMY



Robert Smith, President and CEO of the Capital District Health Authority, says there are serious systemic issues in the human resource system for healthcare that must be addressed.

- = New innovative human resources policies within the public sector are urgently needed, as are competitive compensation packages, changes to systemic rigidity and active recruitment of young public servants.

Perception

- = Nova Scotia must promote itself as a good place to live and work, both here and elsewhere.
- = Companies can help brand Nova Scotia as a good place to live and work by sharing their success stories and promoting available opportunities.
- = Attitude, pride and loyalty are learned at a young age. A "Pride Nova Scotia" program may help raise awareness of the opportunities available in the region and instill a loyalty in our young people so they return after gaining experience elsewhere.
- = Nova Scotian employers must promote themselves more actively to our graduate base. Combining marketing efforts through industry associations could help reduce costs.

Opportunities for young people

- = Students need adequate and thorough career advice to begin in grade nine.
- = To help young people acquire the skills they need for the workplace, more emphasis must be placed on apprenticeships, co-op education and mentoring programs.
- = Nova Scotian employers must be more willing to hire new graduates: those who do find that they become valuable very quickly.



Susan Letson, Partner with The Caldwell Partners, says local employers should promote themselves more, both inside and outside the province.

The pathway of learning in Nova Scotia can be bumpy for some, but why?

A significant segment of Nova Scotia's population cannot participate in the workforce

In 1998, 20 percent of Nova Scotians (as in the rest of Canada) did not complete high school and 12 percent of potential workers did not have the minimum skills for employment.

Youth lack adequate career advice

There are many good careers, but young people are often only aware of popular career choices. There are opportunities for all types of professional, technical and skilled workers in Nova Scotia.

High educational expenses close doors and limit choices for young and mature students

Individuals are deterred from pursuing post-secondary education because of high costs. Those who do, and incur high debts, are often forced to seek highly paid jobs outside the province.

Many new graduates encounter obstacles to entering their chosen careers

Barriers and disincentives to new graduates include employers that demand five years experience, or offer casual work only.

Once in the workforce, there can be a lack of advanced training and an inability to switch careers

Companies today spend less on career and professional development than they did ten years ago. Nova Scotian institutions are often inflexible and make it difficult for people to move between different programs and professions, and between work and education.