

# possibilities

## VISION FOR CUTTING-EDGE INNOVATION AND TOMORROW'S REALITY

Throughout history, amazing opportunities have sprung from seemingly insurmountable challenges. In Canada, there has been talk for quite some time from academics that Canada's productivity performance has not been strong enough to help us close the income gap with leading countries. There are arguments that Canada's economic competitiveness is weakening, innovation is lagging and our education system is not stimulating enough students to complete post-graduate degrees – especially in science and technical disciplines, which underpin innovation.

But for Anne Golden, President and CEO of The Conference Board of Canada, these discussions contain a silver lining – one that holds great opportunities for those who are willing to invest in a new vision for Canadian prosperity.

*“The challenge facing business leaders, academics and governments is to encourage young Canadians to seize the opportunities available to them and, more importantly, to do everything we can to help them succeed,” says Golden. “We must do this not only for the benefit of our children, but in order to ensure that our envied Canadian standard of living is both protected and enhanced.”*

Young Canadians have an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to this country's economic prosperity. The recent boom in the oil and gas and resource sectors aside, the long-term foundations of the Canadian economy are shifting from resources and manufacturing industries towards knowledge-based, highly skilled job sectors.

According to The Conference Board of Canada's study, *Securing Our Future: Components of a Comprehensive IT Workforce Development Strategy*, almost 90,000 IT jobs will need to be filled in the Canadian economy in the next three to five years. This is a remarkable opportunity for young Canadians looking for a dynamic career path, as well as those who are interested in retraining.

To help energize young people about jobs in the computer science and IT sectors, Microsoft founder and Chairman Bill Gates regularly visits North American University campuses to drum up excitement about the innovations and career opportunities in these fields. He visited the University of Waterloo in February to demonstrate cutting-edge technology innovations created by Microsoft Research that will become tomorrow's reality.

However, it will take more than just recruiting more students into these programs. The opportunities are so vast and the need for qualified people is so strong that Canada has to look beyond training our sons and daughters if we are to succeed. To truly reap the rewards of the knowledge economy we need to find ways to attract highly skilled foreign workers to Canada.



The knowledge economy is made up of well educated, highly trained and very mobile people. There are more jobs than people to fill them, so this sought-after group is flexing its muscles by taking its pick of destinations and demanding more of potential employers. Canada is now competing against countries with well-developed IT sectors, like the United States and Ireland, as well as emerging powerhouses like India, China, Brazil and Russia.

Success means that Canada has to keep the graduates we produce *and* attract highly sought-after graduates from other countries. Fortunately, we're in a strong position to realize opportunity from this challenge.

Groundbreaking work by Richard Florida, Professor of Business and Creativity at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto (and himself a recent immigrant to Canada), shows that many of the things we value about Canada – our multicultural cities, our great outdoors, our quality of life and our accepting society – are exactly what these young workers, whether Canadian or foreign, are seeking when they decide where they'll start their careers.

Canada is becoming, more and more, a beacon to attract this talent.

This was central to Microsoft's decision to locate the Microsoft Canada Development Centre in Richmond, British Columbia in late 2007. The MCDC, as it is known, is now home to more than 200 young software developers from Canada and around the world. In order to remain innovative and attract the best and brightest, Microsoft is becoming a progressive, leading-edge company where people will be proud to work. Microsoft understands that an important part of this equation is locating in places like the Greater Vancouver Area because it will attract the best Canadian and foreign workers.

Canada once again is a land of opportunity. For young, well-educated, tech-savvy workers our country provides nearly limitless potential. Our challenge is to provide the right environment to ensure that all young people have the support and encouragement they need to reap the benefits.

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