



Q & A with Matthew Hanlon, Source Atlantic

What does innovation mean to you?

Innovation can mean lots of things to many people but Innovation to me is a process or discipline. This process can be considered successful if the outcome adds value to the market it serves in a way that is different than past outcomes. A successful innovation can be very powerful. It can change or disrupt current markets or even create new markets. There are many different types and models but essentially the outcome needs to add value in a way that is different than past or current offerings.

How does your organization approach innovation?

Innovation has been organic in our company for many years. Certain services or products have been added in response to customer demand. But in order to lead in the future, innovation must become a focus and a strategy. We have begun to develop an innovation model and to start adapting the culture to become more innovative by identifying customer needs and working with the entire team to develop unique solutions.

Why do you think innovation is important for Saint John and the province?

Innovation is one of the best ways I can think of to create new GDP, grow jobs, and increase population. As we've seen with successful innovation efforts around the world, growth through innovation far outpaces traditional organic growth by up to multiple of. With large growth in sales and production the infrastructure and people need to be in place to support the growth. This attracts competition and jobs. Saint John needs a larger working population to achieve its potential, innovation can be a driving factor.

What are some simple things people can do to drive change?

To drive change you need to begin by educating yourself on what's possible now and imagine what's possible in the future (generate ideas). Then you need to take action - ask your 5 W's, question the status quo. Question traditional methods. Answers like "We've always done it this way", or "that's not my job" are innovation killers. Finally, you need to surround yourself with others who can help you implement. Know that not every idea will survive or be great but the more you try the more success you will have.

How is technology changing your business model?

Technology is greatly impacted our company over even the last 6 years. We implemented a new ERP in 2011 which greatly increased our ability to collect and analyze data which has given us an advantage over the competition. Data is now the cornerstone of any innovative solution. We are becoming experts in data specific to supply chain management which allows us to work with customers to collect and analyze data within the scope of their business. We work with supply chain data every day and are building best practices which we can then offer our customers as solutions.

Where would you direct people if they wanted to learn more about innovation?

Start with simple Google searches. Look at all of the different ideas and definitions of Innovation. Once you start researching you will begin to develop your own perspective on innovation and you will also be able to relate to other's perspectives. If you are in a company, discuss innovation with your peers, your management and, if possible, your ownership. Get their ideas about innovation and see if they think it's important or not. Finally, talk with others in the community. NETWORK! Saint John, and New Brunswick in general, seem to have a vast network of innovation focused people and companies. Work with organizations like Enterprise Saint John and Opportunities NB to learn more about what's going on in your community, look for incubators and accelerators, and attend events focused on innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology. Finally, I would like to remind anyone that innovation isn't limited to certain sectors or organizations, innovation is a practice that can be applied to anything.