

Research Means Collaboration



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Our relationship to research has changed a great deal in recent years. Although we no longer ask why we should do research, we should still ask if we do it the right way and, above all, how we generate value from the fruits of our labours.

The time has come to be innovative when it comes to innovation. In terms of innovation and productivity, Canada ranks low these days. All the classifications done in the past few years show Canada lagging behind other industrialized countries where innovation and productivity are concerned. Worse yet, productivity improvement is poorer here than in other parts of the world. According to an INSEAD study, Canada ranks 95th out of 132 countries in workforce productivity growth.

Productivity is a complex phenomenon and it is dangerous to name one single cause when things are not going as smoothly as desired. Especially in Canada, research and development, a cornerstone of productivity, is a responsibility shared much better than elsewhere.

It is a little-known fact that Canada stands out among the G7 countries for the concentration of

research and development in the university sector. Canadian universities perform over one-third of all R&D in the country (36.6%), compared to 12.8% in the United States, 19.7% in France and 11.6% in Japan. Canadian companies, on the other hand, conduct 52.8% of the country's R&D, a significantly lower figure than in the United States (72.6%) or Japan (78.5%).

This is what leads me to say that if there is any key to improving Canadian productivity, it is to be found not within the business sector, nor in the universities or government, but rather in the interface between these three major pillars of R&D. Precisely because R&D is more evenly shared here than elsewhere, collaboration between these three economic players is strategically.

"Collaboration" is the key word. We must facilitate collaborations by reducing the cultural gaps between

industry and universities and by cutting red tape in knowledge transfer.

Our universities are internationally renowned, and the Université de Montréal, which ranks among the top five universities in Canada for research, delivers a major contribution to science in our country. And that means not only the work of our researchers today, but also the training we provide for the scientists of tomorrow. Every year, we award 1 out of every 13 doctorates earned in Canada.

Managing healthcare, the fight against crime, aboriginal governance, combating the school dropout problem – all are questions that business and government alike must address, and that researchers at the Université de Montréal and throughout the country are working on day in and day out.

It seems that the time has come for governments and businesses

to appeal to researchers to support their policy decisions, on one hand, and their business decisions, on the other. This is not to disparage the public service, or independent experts, but rather to supply the scientific tools to help them better fulfill their respective missions. It is not their role to stand on the frontiers of knowledge in today's world and identify what has worked or not worked. That is the role of researchers...who ask nothing more than to contribute even more directly to the welfare of their fellow citizens.

The Université de Montréal will begin this movement. In the near future, we will propose to the federal and provincial governments that they should call on our researchers in one or more of our 200 research units in order to test hypotheses for solving the challenges that confront them. And we're planning to cre-

ate a single-window resource for this purpose, which would allow researchers from every field to have direct access to our research expertise. This single window would also make accountability in research more fluid by standardizing the various administrative tasks researchers must comply with and which far too often distract them from their own work.

Let us create a movement that encourages research for the benefit of all citizens. Let us involve our governments and businesses in putting our massive knowledge-based capital, much of it internationally celebrated and developed by researchers in our country, to work for economic growth and the common good.

If research can give us smartphones, why can't it also give us a smart country, a better place for all of us in which to live and work?