

# CONFESSIONS OF A PILOT PROJECT JUNKY

by Paul Born

I am a pilot project junky! I love the feeling I get when starting something that is described as cutting edge, innovative, one of a kind, impossible, visionary, unrealistic, never been tried before ... you get the point!

There is a certain “rush” in doing CED work primarily because we are breaking new ground with people and communities who need our help. The excitement of enabling inclusion for people normally excluded from the midst of our economic system. The rush of being part of a new economic order.

So why does this make me a pilot project junky? Furthermore, how is my pilot project addiction of any concern to my colleagues in the CED field?

It is my premise that the CED field has a warehouse full of excellent and relevant technology and knowledge that can be used to broaden our reach and impact. The field must learn a “new way” in order to achieve greater scale and impact of its work.

This new way does not exclude innovative Research and Development (R&D). It does not exclude pilot projects. This “new way” recognizes the technology that is working and seeks to duplicate it strategically and/or grow it significantly where it currently exists.

## **CED HAS PROVEN ITSELF**

CED has proven itself effective in all regions of Canada working with most marginalized groups in the country. The innovations are too numerous to mention in this short article. I would like to highlight three major categories, however: self-employment development, community mobilization, and community asset development and ownership.

### ***Self-Employment Development & Microlending***

CED organizations were on the forefront in recognizing the trend nationally toward self-employment. Many organizations, among them CODA, CBRC, Learning Enrichment Foundation, SEDI, WRED, MCC, SEED Winnipeg, and the Centre for Community Enterprise, have developed excellent training programs enabling thousands of unemployed people or welfare recipients to start their own businesses.

But these are programs with a difference. In addition to recognizing the need for small business training, the organizations developed broadly-based community supports to enhance the success of their clients. These supports include things like microloan funds, business resource centres, mentorship programs, marketing networks, cultural, and gender and age specific curricula.

The organizations have also battled locally and nationally for welfare and unemployment eligibility policies which assist (rather than discourage) the clients' initiative. Most programs are now considering second-stage development issues for their clients: capitalization to grow their

businesses; growth-related training issues; and municipal by-law changes for home-based businesses.

CED organizations were some of the first to recognize the growing trend toward self-employment because they are *present in their community*. It is this presence and commitment to local issues which makes them development organizations rather than simple small business trainers.

### ***Community Mobilization***

CED organizations know how to mobilize a community, which is often undergoing significant economic and social stress. These are communities with higher than average unemployment rates, poverty rates, crime rates, death rates - and fewer social and economic supports.

Organizations like New Dawn in Cape Breton, RESO in Montreal, LEF in York Region of Toronto, Nisagi Development Corporation, Lutherwood CODA in Waterloo Region have mobilized huge networks of people, many resources, and a growing political will to develop the economic and social infrastructure of their communities.

These are organizations which have learned to be the fence for people come to, sit on, and do the talking they need to do before taking action together. The people are from all sectors, cultures, and language groups. They have diverse political, economic, and religious beliefs. They are rich, poor, and in-between.

CED organizations have proven means by which to mobilize communities in all their diversity and complexity, avoiding polarization and focussing opportunity and hope. These methods include organizing, broad-based listening, group development, strategic planning, group process, conflict resolution, animating, catalytic leadership, and inclusion.

What makes CED organizations different is not the use of any one of these skills. Rather, it is the *constant* use of many of these methods together, while remaining constant and present in the community. These organizations have learned to listen and thus understand and implement that which is obvious to the majority in a community.

### ***Community Asset Ownership & Development***

Community asset ownership and development is central to most CED organizations in Canada. This is done most often through supporting the development of locally owned small enterprises, the development of co-operatives, not-for-profit businesses, training businesses, and sectoral business and community networks. Organizations like the Niagara Enterprise Agency, the Enterprise Centre (Revelstoke), New Dawn Enterprises (Sydney), Edmonton Recycling Society, and the Human Resources Development Association (Halifax) have created multi-million dollar businesses, employing and or training hundreds of local people or developing broad-based networks of support to strengthen marginalized communities.

These are more than economic development vehicles, though. These organizations have helped communities to think about and develop local opportunities, niche markets, local ownership, the human resource potential of the poor, the less educated, the disabled. These organizations have found powerful synergies between social needs and economic opportunity. They organizations

are helping to define community in the context of a global market place by elevating local potential.

## **BEYOND THE EXPERIMENT**

CED no longer needs to see itself as an experiment. The depth of innovation and the cumulative results of CED organizations in Canada must be recognized by the CED sector. It is time for us to forge a bold new road, a national railway that links our work and provides a vehicle to expand our work and impact across the country.

I propose there are three types of raw material required to create this national CED railway: new skills, new technology, and new partnerships.

## **NEW SKILLS**

People with community development, social development, and human development skills design CED organizations. These are our strengths, which we must continue to develop. But the sector must attract more people with skills in wealth creation, management, and opportunity leveraging.

### ***Wealth Creation***

Creating wealth - making money - is central to CED. It is a goal we have for our clients and community businesses. Making money is not easy and probably more an art than a science.

I cannot define the skills required to make money. I only know that when people who have made money get involved in our organization we begin to change the way we do business. People who have made money are looking for ways to give back to their community.

I have found that the CED vision and value base is often compelling to entrepreneurial people. As a sector we need to find a place for people who know how to make money. We can never have a whole team of moneymakers; this would not be CED. But we can see the added value of having money-makers on our team.

### ***Better Management***

Well-managed CED organizations are always more successful than those which are not. As obvious as this may sound, most CED organizations are managed by people with little or no previous management training or experience. Don't get me wrong. Formal management training and serious management experience will by no means preclude poor management. But they will help us to grow CED in Canada. We need to attract good managers to our CED teams and promote management training in the sector.

### **Formalize Leveraging Skills**

You probably know the story of the woman who makes soup from a stone by enticing others to contribute the ingredients. Well, I have seen CED organizations make more "stone soup" than any other sector. For CED practitioners, frugality is a way of life.

CED organizations have the ability to leverage money, volunteers, partnerships, and - most importantly -community will, all in the interests of realizing economic and social change. This is very much at the heart of our most successful organizations. This leveraging technology in our midst needs to be studied, captured, and translated so that it can be taught.

## **NEW TECHNOLOGY**

If CED is to achieve scale and mainstream recognition we need to find less exhausting ways to grow it.

Two methodologies warrant exploration: franchising (turnkey transfer of programs) and technical assistance networks.

I am almost afraid to mention the word "franchising," it is so closely associated nowadays with fast-food chains or hardware stores. Nevertheless, the technology of franchising cannot be ignored. It is a proven method by which to translate knowledge, products, and services to locally-owned and -managed enterprises.

Through franchising, ideas have proven transferable to all regions, to all cultures, and to both rural and urban communities in Canada. CED organizations have well-developed products and services which I believe can be translated into methodologies which can be successfully implemented anywhere. We may want to change the name. We certainly must adapt the technology to be consistent with the values and visions of CED. But franchising should not be ignored as a way for established CED organizations to broaden their impact quickly and methodically.

Two technical assistance networks have already formed in Canada namely, CEDTAP and The Digby Network. Each of these speaks to the need to distribute the best practice and generate the capacity necessary for growing CED in Canada.

CEDTAP's Ted Jackson recently tabled for discussion a 4-point strategy in this regard:

- CEDTAP - Technical Assistance.
- CEDDAP - Development Assistance for more established organizations.
- CEDCAP - Capital assistance for the best venture development.
- Digby (or something like it) to organize the field.

I agree with Ted that these four concepts could very well be the technical assistance pillars of CED, and will discuss the proposal in greater detail in my next article.

## **NEW PARTNERSHIPS**

If CED is to achieve scale and mainstream recognition we need to form partnerships with large and mainstream institutions. This does not preclude the need to continue linking and growing our partnerships with local, small, grassroots, like-minded networks. That is essential. It does recognize, however, that the mainstream is not our enemy and that large mainstream institutions are making serious inquiries into how to partner with CED organizations.

The private sector continues to be intrigued by CED. The Conference Board of Canada brought together nearly 20 private sector partners to discuss CED. Though many of us "purebred" CED

types were not enthusiastic about the format and cost of these meetings, they happened nevertheless.

Lutherwood CODA (which received \$400,000 in private contributions toward its loan fund) has funded a \$1.3 million CED project through private foundations and corporate donors, including the Royal Bank, Atkinson, and McConnell Foundation. The Learning Enrichment Foundation has partnered with Microsoft and others. Bell Canada set up the Bell Canada Economic Development Fund with the Economic Developers Council of Ontario. (Again, not pure CED but in the right general direction).

The list could go on but you get my point. CED has the interest of the private sector. How do we work with them? Can we, are we *willing* to build a win-win partnership with business?

There are other partnerships to explore, be they with municipalities, civic groups, large NGOs - all who have an interest in CED and want to partner to forward the economic interests of their clients. The sector has some great partnership examples of which few are documented. If CED is to achieve its potential we must find ways to partner with large organizations and the mainstream.

## **NOW WHAT?**

Where does all this lead us? In the spring issue of this magazine I want to expand on the sectors need for CEDTAP, CEDDAP, CEDCAP, and Digby, while further exploring this in the context of Canadian and global partnerships. I will comment on how we need to shape our policy and learning environment. I will also propose an image makeover for CED. A final installment in this 3-part series will, hopefully, share with you a development model I have been exploring which I call "P5pC3."


## **Bio**

As he admits, PAUL BORN is a pilot project junky, now freelancing in CED while pursuing a Masters degree in Leadership and Training at Royal Roads University (Victoria, B.C.). He was the executive director of CODA for 12 years before it merged with Lutherwood to form Waterloo region's largest non-government agency. (He still spends two days a week working in the new organization on the Opportunities 2000 initiative.)

At the time of the merger, CODA had 55 full-time staff, an annual budget of over \$3 million, and was serving nearly 6,000 people a year. In 12 years it had helped 5700 people get back to work and helped start nearly 1100 businesses. In that time, CODA operated an average of 15-20 projects at a time, of which up to 50% were pilots. Opportunities Planning, CODA's most successful pilot, lasted four years and helped 1100 individuals (out of work for an average of 34 months) get back to work. The pilot used an innovative CED model, partnering with 21 neighborhoods/communities to deliver a wide range of supports and services. The best of this pilot has been used to develop Opportunities 2000, whose launched was reported in this summer's issue of *Making Waves*. In 1998 these initiatives were recognized by the United Nations (Habitat) as among the 100 best urban development practices in the world (URL <http://www.bestpractices.org>).

This series of articles is part Paul's effort to come to grips with his "problem." He looks forward to your collegial advice. Contact him at (tel) , (fax), (e-mail) [paulborn@bond.net](mailto:paulborn@bond.net)

Note: this article first appeared in Making Waves.

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