

3.3 Competitiveness

This section of the discussion focused on the perceived definition and attributes of the term "competitiveness". What emerged from the respondents was that the term conjured up not so much an economic definition i.e., competitive means more price sensitive products; good quality products; and being more productive -- these were all "givens" - - as it did an attitude that Canadians were lacking -- that of being aggressive or assertive.

This definitional context -- of being aggressive or assertive -- was a point of common harmony amongst respondents, with the belief being that even with all the right products, planning and assistance, being competitive would not be achieved without being aggressive, assertive or "salesman like". In this respect, respondents felt that Canadians often "plan things to death" instead of just "doing it" -- the implication being that while planning is prudent and diminishes risk, the critical mass can get bogged down in talking about action rather than taking action, thus leaving the field open to others who are more aggressive.

In terms of competitiveness, respondents felt that Canadians have absolutely no choice if "we are to survive in the world stage", and that "we must pay the price in terms of sacrifices required". However, in terms of what these sacrifices could be -- outside of lowering personal expectations, etc. -- few respondents knew what real consequences could arise, or how they might be affected personally. Yet, despite this lack of knowledge, there was optimism that each and all would "get through" and benefit from the results. The view of respondents was that Canadians -- themselves, their regions and the country -- generally were woefully unprepared for greater competitiveness: even though many perceive what the notion of competitiveness engendered, and despite not knowing the resulting consequences of "tooling up", respondents were quick to indicate that the missing link in the process was an overall contextual framework, plan or strategy for dealing with the economic challenges of international trade in the future -- a blue print, that while collective in effect, would have to come from government.