

3.4 International Trade: A Focus

Respondents felt that an increased focus on international trade would have a positive impact on research and development, and job training. As noted above, respondents felt that various influencers should play a collective role: that government should set the framework and encourage/fund specific elements of research and development to capitalize on new areas of product or service "exports", and that job training should be the combined focus of the key players including business and labour -- however, in this area, specific attention should be given to the educational framework at the secondary and post secondary level to prepare the next generation for entering the new global age of international competitiveness. In terms of job re-training -- for those workers currently employed and who could be displaced as a result of new circumstances, there was a view that this was a necessary consequence of restructuring; however, when respondents were asked to visualize themselves being placed in this position they were less enthusiastic in terms of both the consequences or prospects of job retraining -- primarily because they did not know what "safety net" or skill training would be advanced on their behalf.

Also, as noted earlier, increased foreign investment was seen as an opportunity in a new international trade focus; however, sovereignty issues were raised as concerns unless government had a "check and balance" scheme in order to keep Canada competitive and Canadian in the 1990's.

In the context of current government initiatives (i.e., GST, UIC, R&D efforts, etc.), respondents did not see any apparent link between these activities and any preparation for international trade or competitiveness. Further, many respondents viewed these domestic initiatives in isolation with a growing perception that an uncoordinated series of actions such as these in the absence of a linked framework will likely give rise to a disparate and potentially negative set of consequences.

Having discussed all of the matters noted above, the term "going global" was reintroduced for recognition -- to which respondents indicated that given the context of international trade and competitiveness, there was a definite focus and conceptual understanding.