
The Future Meeting of Minds

*A summary report on the use of
Flipspace technology for conducting
online discussions*



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A summary report on the use of "FlipSpace" technology
for conducting online discussions

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Introduction

The internet has changed many things. How we gather information and how we communicate, to name just two. All organizations function on a base of sound information and good communications. With these principles in mind, **Managing Imaginations Inc. (MI)** undertook a project to look at how the latest software, plus computer-based facilitators, can bring the internet into the realm of the modern meeting. We were specifically exploring the option of hosting select meetings facilitated by local boards in an on-line environment. We needed to know the impact on costs and on the levels of participation. The driving force behind this project was the ever increasing cost involved in bringing people together. This may include travel expenses, hotels, meals, or it may be time lost and opportunities missed while participants are away at meetings. With the freedom that the internet provides, we believe that it is now possible to have very effective and very creative, problem solving sessions held on-line. These on-line sessions are independent of one's location, (provided the participants can gain access to a computer and internet), and independent of time. One can log-on and contribute anytime from almost anywhere during the prescribed period for the on-line session.

Local Boards bring a wide range of stakeholders together to share information and ideas, and to plan solutions to local labour market issues. This entire effort hinges on the ability of the local board to identify and engage the right people in the consultation process. Given that the people who are needed at these meetings are often the busiest members of the community, and that they are generally participating on a volunteer basis, it has been shown that the problem of dealing with local issues starts with a problem of getting the right people to take the time necessary to come to meetings to design the solutions and build the necessary action plans.

The project undertaken by **Managing Imaginations Inc.** was to design and facilitate a series of sessions for Local Boards that would be held on-line using a web-software called **Flipspace**. By undertaking this project we hoped to determine if the use of modern software, and trained facilitators, can assist in getting the results Local Boards need from their communities, and do so at a much reduced cost.

This summary report is presented in two parts. Part A provides an overview and background of the proprietary software, **Flipspace**. We will discuss how an event is structured and the stages or steps in a typical **Flipspace** event. We have also included at the end of this report a page giving some links to other currently available options for conducting meetings online (See Appendix A). In Part B we discuss the findings from five on-line sessions, conducted by **Managing Imaginations Inc.**, in conjunction with Niagara Training & Adjustment Board, (NTAB).

Part A: Online Meeting Technology - *FlipSpace*

Overview and Background

FlipSpace is a web based electronic collaboration system that was designed specifically to support facilitated problem solving. The system differs from traditional discussion boards in that it embodies the idea of process 'flow'. In other words, **FlipSpace** events move through a series of focused sessions during which the participants work on specific questions and in a particular mode, for example, generating ideas, or voting on possible solutions. This mode of working was designed into the system from the very start, because it was intended to support a range of different creative problem solving methodologies.

The original version of the system was developed in the late 1990s. Since that time it has been through numerous revisions and has been used by a large collection of clients ranging from the United Nations through to small independent charities.

Each session is designed to be a unique event and to meet the needs of the client and the group that has been assembled for that topic or issue. However, there are certain roles that we can define, and certain structures that will be required, in every **FlipSpace** event.

The Nature and Structure of a *FlipSpace* Event

1. Roles

The Client

This person will be the individual who will call the session and recruit the participants. The client will manage the budget, establish the time-frame, consult with the facilitators and supply the email address of the participants. All emails will go out over the client's signature. This means that the client generally acts as the hub for all communications throughout the process. The most frequent scenario is that the client will own the problem, but in some cases the client may manage the **FlipSpace** event for another person who brings the problem to the Local Board and requests the use of this technology. The client is the link between the participants and the facilitator.

The Facilitator

This individual is the link between the client and the technician. The facilitator is well versed in the **FlipSpace** software, but more importantly, this person is able to meet with the client and design the questions and prepare the probes that will be posted on the site during the event. The trick is always to know what questions to ask and how to ask them. The facilitator will monitor the activity

every day of the event to see if the level of participation is as expected, and if not, suggest ways to bring the group onto the site. He or she will also watch the discussion to see if a new area, or topic, seems to be developing and if it needs a 'new page' to allow the group to explore that concept in more detail.

The Technician

This person links the facilitator to the computers that house the web software. The technician may load on the email addresses and debug any problems which may prevent participants getting started. He/she may advise the facilitator and the client of the establishing of new pages, extending the time-window, or the phrasing of the posted page titles and descriptions.

The Participants

Obviously the most important group, these people have agreed in advance to become involved in the event and to participate on-line. This groups needs to be recruited from the population of stakeholders for the topic that is being explored so that all sides of the issue are present in the group. The participants need only very basic computer skills, but they do need a willingness to spend the same time and effort on this method of meeting as they might if they were to attend a face-to-face session. We will have more to say about this group and communications with them in a later section.

2. The Selection of the Topic

It is always important to assess any tool as to it's appropriateness for the task. ***Flipspace*** does not lend itself to all forms of meetings, (e.g. contract negotiations or conflict resolution), but it has been shown to get very effective results when the topic is one that requires a diverse group of people to assemble and proceed through a problem solving methodology that explores the facts, clarifies the real issues, generates a range of options, selects the best option and plans the appropriate actions. Doing Creative Problem Solving, (CPS) is very similar with an on-line venue as it is in a regular meeting room. Both situations require a client and a facilitator, whether the participants assemble in a room for a day or log into a site each day for a week.

3. The Size of the Group

Since this tool does not require a 'room' in its traditional meaning, there is not the upper boundary one often encounters when space is limited. Also, since any number of people can be on-line and inputting ideas and information all at the same time in response to the daily questions and probes, there are no concerns about 'one person speaking at a time'. Everyone is their own 'scribe', and will write and post their contributions. These inputs will be captured and immediately available to the entire group for comments, to build-on, or as a springboard to a new idea. If the group is very small they may miss some important perspectives, and if it is too large the volume of reading may become overwhelming. Generally, it is safe to consider that the on-line groups will be larger than face-to-face groups, but still manageable.

4. The Time Frame

This can vary depending on the nature of the problem and the group. Most frequently, we have structured the events to be held over five (5) consecutive, working days. In such cases the participants are encouraged to log onto the site at least twice a day, early morning and late afternoon. The questions, probes, new pages, any voting, etc. will all be managed in the evenings by the facilitator and launched to the site at night, ready for the start of each day. An alternative to this is to have the event held over two weeks and to post new probes every other day. This structure allows the client and the facilitators a bit more time to review the inputs and consider the direction of the discussions with more care. Because of the flexibility of this tool by its very nature, you can design any time frame that you feel will work for the topic and the group. For example, you may select to meet on-line daily for several days, then stop while some test is undertaken, then reconvene and discuss the results. You may also agree that everyone will attempt to go on-line for a set period of time and at a fixed hour. This topic will get further discussion in Part B when we consider the ***Flipspace*** events undertaken in this project.

The Stages of a *Flipspace* Event

Although the details will vary and each session will have unique aspects, the following stages are generally seen in every event:

1. The Planning Stage

Once a client has identified a possible opportunity to use an on-line session to address a particular topic or issue, then the planning begins. The nature of the challenge and the composition of the participant group need to be explored with both the facilitator and the technician. This planning meeting will result in clear objectives or deliverables that all parties can now expect from the event. Everyone on the team will be aware, and have accepted, their role. The window of time when the event will take place will be established and the budget and contracts will be finalized. In many cases care must be taken to ensure that all parties who may be involved in the topic are invited to participate. It is important to ensure that decision makers are present and participating so that the process is not stalled by lack of decision making authority. As with any meeting, the outcomes depend heavily on the planning stage and particularly on who is invited, and who is not. This stage can be quite complex and consume a considerable amount of time and effort. Face-to-face meetings with the client, some representatives of the population of participants and the facilitators will help to bring all the conditions and constraints onto the table before they become problems during the session. This stage might take up to two weeks. If the relationships are not already established with the participants, it may take longer to engage them in this process.

2. Pre-Event Preparation

The team of client, facilitator and technician now bring the pieces together ready to launch the session on the appointed date. The client sends out the emails inviting the target population of possible participants to become involved and explains briefly what is expected. Once the participant list has been assembled the email addresses are transferred to the technician. The client will email detailed instructions to the selected participants about how to log on and enter the practice pages. Samples of these emails are provided in the appendix as items B-1, B-2 and B-3. During this stage the team is preparing the questions or probes that will be posted on 'day one' and anticipating what they will need to do to review the material generated each day and post the next set of pages throughout the week(s). This stage generally takes place the week before the *Flipspace* 'goes live'.

3. Preparation of the Participants

We need to assume that this tool will be rather new to most participants even though *Group Ware* has been around for several years. We also need to assume that the participants will not be easily induced into going through the learning curve that is proposed. It is critical to get all participants properly registered and have each one go onto the site and practice. Once a person has logged-in

there is a demo page and a 'play' page. Past experience has confirmed that if people take the time to 'play', they will find the event much more rewarding and be much more active throughout. Of course, the big challenge here is to get people to take the time to practice. Prodding the participants group to 'do their preparation and get comfortable with the site' takes place in the period 48 to 72 hours before going live.

4. Monitoring the Live Session

Typically the preparations have taken place, the learning curve has been completed and on Day 1, when everyone is expecting it, the participants will get an email saying that the "meeting" is underway. This note will include a link to the site, a reminder of any critical instructions and a way to get help if they run into a problem. An example of such a letter is in appendix B-2. The client is usually the help desk, but the problem may be sent up the chain to the facilitator or even to the technician, if needed. The client typically does not take part in the session but may decide to 'start things off' with a few entries. The client, facilitator and technician will all be actively watching the flow of inputs onto the site in the first day for the purpose of managing the process. Each evening (or every other day if over 2 weeks), the facilitator and client review to decide if the direction the group is going is satisfactory or if probes are needed to redirect them. Probes are put out to the group via emails and on the **Flipspace** pages.

5. Converging the Ideas during an Event

Frequently, a **Flipspace** event will call on the participants to provide their perceptions or generate ideas that could lead to solutions. Tasks such as these result in a huge list, with multiple threads. The job of establishing which ideas are the top priorities is not an easy one. The **Flipspace** software does have the capacity to allow the participants to rank alternatives or to vote for specific options. It is, however, frequently the client and the facilitator who are left with the task of distilling the material down and selecting which items, or cluster of items, will be put forward for evaluation.

6. Post-Event Wrap-up

Once the end date has been reached and an email has gone out thanking all those for their participation, the client can do a variety of things with the inputs. The pages can be printed, verbatim, exactly as the material was submitted to the site. The pages can also be exported to a Microsoft Word document and modified. Reports can be prepared and quotes taken from this material can be easily be cut and pasted into new documents. Files can be organized to allow 'like ideas' that may have appeared at different times in the session to be collected and worked on by sub-groups or by the client. The **Flipspace** format is much friendlier than the traditional rolls of flip chart paper one might have had to deal with after some past meeting.

Part B: Five Pilot Projects

In an effort to assess the viability of this resource to achieve desired results from on-line meetings, Managing Imaginations conducted five **FlipSpace** events in partnership with Niagara Training & Adjustment Board. Examples of meeting types included TOP consultations with key industry leaders and project specific discussion groups. Since all **FlipSpace** events are conducted with a strict promise of confidentiality specific details about those clients cannot be shared. However, an overview and lessons learned have been provided.

Analysis of the Pilot Events

The five **FlipSpace** events provided considerable information about utilizing this approach; when it will work for Local Boards and when it may not. We have attempted to extract the key factors which we think have the largest impact on success and each has been discussed. This analysis is highly subjective as the comments collected were the opinions of the event managers and a small sample of participants. We do have hard data on the participation rates and our observations of the daily activity in response to the probes that were posted during each event.

Overview of the Results

The results varied from one event that had excellent input of very sound, usable ideas and comments, to another event that stalled and was suspended due to a very low participation rate. Overall we found that just as it is difficult to get people to attend face-to-face meetings, it is also difficult to get people to sign-on and contribute in an on-line setting. Getting a well motivated, committed group, who have made themselves comfortable with this tool, is the most critical factor for success. The nature of the questions and the wording of the probes that are posted appear to be the second important factor affecting success. We will explore each of these and other factors in detail below.

Gaining the Participation You Need

Any facilitator will be able to describe the different types or styles of participation at meetings. One such style is the 'Prisoner'; ("I was sent here by my boss"), and another is the 'Vacationer'; ("I'm here because it's a good excuse to get out of my office"). Local Boards call on people, as volunteers, to take part in discussions on a wide variety of topics. It is very difficult to get full participation and draw out creative ideas from those who arrive at any meeting, regardless of the format. In other words it is often too easy to 'hide'. In a room full of people it is possible to stay silent, or contribute by simply supporting an idea already on the table. In an on-line event, such as **FlipSpace**, it is even easier to 'hide'. The initial invitation to participate may be seen as a lower

priority than many other tasks these busy community members will have on their desks. Further, the impact of not being active and highly involved is minimal and certainly much less of a risk than being inactive in a meeting at their regular workplace.

The initial job of the event manager and the facilitator, then, is to try very hard to assemble the right group. Ideally this assemblage will be representative of all the stakeholders but more importantly it must have a minimum of Prisoners and Vacationers. Motivating those who have agreed to join in the event is difficult to do using only on-line communications. One option to be considered is to have a conference call or a short meeting with those who will participate and to get a strong contract from each member in the group that they will, in fact, be active and make this event work. For this contract to hold, it requires that each person accept the importance of the topic they will address and the power that they have to make a serious impact on the course of action that will result from their deliberations. When people have a clear understanding of the possibilities and the responsibilities inherent in being a contributing member of an event, there is a higher degree of commitment and therefore a higher rate of solid participation.

The preparation of those selected to be participants is extremely important. The majority of people who will 'sign on' will have had some exposure to on-line discussion groups and be very computer savvy, but a facilitated problem solving structure will most likely be new. The **FlipSpace** site has two pages designed to help people get started, (*'Click here to learn about using this site' and 'Play'*). These two pages invite the new participant to a place where he/she can learn and practice the specifics of the site and how to enter input or respond to the input from others. Past experience demonstrates that if the participants do not take the time and effort necessary to go through this learning and practice, they will not be comfortable and will soon see the discussion moving on without them. Once a person feels confused or 'behind' in terms of participation, it is very easy to simply opt out. The key here is for the event manager to be very strong on insisting that the participants ALL take part in the preparation and practice pages before the event and that they have all questions and concerns about the log on, inputting and responding, answered well before the launch date.

From our experience with a large number of **FlipSpace** events over time, if the group is highly motivated and well prepared the participation rate will be very high, as high as 100%. In the events undertaken in this project a good rate was seen as 50%.

Asking the Right Questions

The questions or probes that are posted on each page are made-up of two parts; the heading for the page and then a more detailed description of what is

expected. The heading will also appear on the front or welcome page and needs to be a short but catching phrase. The description is the more important message and requires considerable thought, to capture the right wording of these messages. The relevancy of the issue being put forward in these probes is the first factor to consider. If the task or challenge is seen as too simple or too complex the participants will begin to withdraw. The descriptions must bring an immediate feeling of both interest and willingness to respond. Ideally the participant will see the wording and say; "Yes, that's important and yes, I have something to say on that topic".

Wording the Probes

The framing of the probes is critical. In most cases the earlier probes are written as open-ended questions with a lead-in phrase such as: "In what ways might we..." or "How might we..." As the event proceeds the probes may shift into a convergent mode; asking the participants to vote or rank order their preferences to a given set of options. The careful drafting of these probes is the work of the event client and the facilitator. Frequently they are able to plan the entire set of probes for the full event in advance, but always with the capacity to adjust and deal with the input as it unfolds.

Factors Affecting Success

There are numerous factors that the client and facilitators cannot control, such as if and when someone comes online, or what they post. What follows is a list of some of the main factors or variables that can and must be managed if the event is to have a high likelihood of success.

1. The Nature of the Issue in Question

This report has already dealt with the importance of using this tool when it is agreed that this is the best way to get the task completed. Certainly not all meetings and forums can be done online. However, as your core people become better acquainted with the tool, you may find that the range of possible topics will expand.

2. The Composition of the Group

A highly motivated, knowledgeable group who are creative and trusting will find this tool easy and effective. People who are too busy or not connected to the issue will provide very little of value.

3. The Daily Probes

The language and descriptions presented daily for each task are critical to engagement and keeping the interest of the participant. As in any meeting, how the facilitator poses the question greatly affects the ideas that flow from those in attendance.

4. Timing of the Event

The one or two week formats seem most appropriate for using this tool to support the work of the local boards. This should not be seen as a constraint as any timeframe could be considered. We also found that it is important to keep a keen eye on other events on the calendar such as holidays or conflicting activities as they will push the *Flipspace* to a lower priority.

5. The Set-up and Initial Support

Getting the emails of the participants onto the site is the easy part, getting the participants to understand and become comfortable with the site takes some effort. The email that gives the participants their first set of instructions is critical. A sample is shown in appendix B-2.

6. The Daily Reminder

We find that a gentle nudge each morning when a new page is opened, coming via the emails, is an effective communication to help people stay connected. This reminder can give the site link and a message of reinforcement (or pleading) as appropriate. Again, given the strength of the relationship between the client and the participant, this request can increase the desire to help out the client.

The Cost Benefit Considerations

To properly assess if any new technology is appropriate you will want to consider the costs/benefits and do so for each potential *Flipspace* event.

The Costs:

1. The *Flipspace* Site: The *Flipspace* site plus the technical support to get emails logged in and debugged starts at \$1000 for the week (5 or 7 days). If more technical work is required to do special writing or set up prioritization pages, the technician rate is \$100 per hour.

2. Facilitator Time: This rate will vary slightly among facilitators; however, a base fee of \$1500 will get an event through planning, design of the probes and the launch. If the client requests more hours to assist with the monitoring or to change direction mid-stream, these additional hours will also be billed at \$100 per hour.

3. The Client's Time: The hours spent planning and preparing for an online event will often be less than the time required to host a face-to-face meeting. These hours should be considered but after a few *Flipspace* events this number should be only 4 to 6 hours per event.

The Benefits:

1. The Out-of-Pocket Savings: These are costs that will appear in somebody's expenses. They are the easy ones to calculate and include travel, hotels, meals, meeting room rental, refreshments, etc.

2. The Convenience Factor: It is much more difficult to put a price on the convenience of being able to participate from one's own desk on one's own time. A value could also be put on the fact that some members of the community would not attend a meeting but would participate online. The reverse may also be true and then be seen as a negative.

3. Time to Reflect: In a face-to-face meeting held in a room for one day, there is limited time to reflect on information or ideas that are presented. The time allowed for considering new or creative options to a problem is usually also very limited. In an online event, when the thinking and discussions can carry over a week, or even two, the opportunity exists for information and ideas to come forward that would not have come to mind in a short meeting. There is flexibility to enter additional thoughts even after a particular topic has closed. Participants do have the ability to go back, if that is the manner in which the space has been set up.

4. The Anonymity Factor: Most *FlipSpace* clients choose to declare that any input will be seen by all participants but is anonymous and that no individual input will be identified with the author unless the author so chooses. This factor changes the group dynamic and our early indications are that the ideas put forward show a wider range and a higher risk factor.

5. Diversity of Input: One of the biggest benefits of online working is the ability to involve a more diverse group. When coupled with the largely unlimited meeting size, offered by *FlipSpace*, this means that a much wider range of views could be solicited on any topic and experts from around the world could join in.

Summary:

The “online world” will continue to present us with new and exciting ways in which we can communicate, share our ideas and solve problems together. Organizations that depend on gathering ideas and opinions will certainly be looking at how to accomplish this using computer technology. One such option; the facilitated online ***Flipspace*** event was considered in this summary report. These considerations have been based on the five pilot events conducted in Southern Ontario under the guidance of NTAB. After each pilot event, discussions were held with the client and in some cases with participants. The broad consensus is that facilitated online events could play a role in the work of Local Boards and if these events are managed according to the findings reviewed above, they will contribute in a very positive way.

Moving from traditional face-to-face events to online events will have a significant learning curve and yet every indication points to a major savings and a capacity to achieve excellent participation once the knowledge and skills have become comfortable for all people performing the various roles.

Appendix

A: Annotated List of Useful Links

B-1 – B-3: Sample Emails

C: Communique/Flyer

Appendix A: Annotated List of Useful Links

<http://www.facilitate.com>

This website offers software for purchase and also hosted offerings.

<http://www.brainreactions.net>

This is one of a growing number of online ideation sites.

<http://www.groupsystems.com>

Considered very much the grand daddy of this world. They have a product called ThinkTank that offers a whole range of features.

<http://www.webex.com>

Webex is a different type of product. It is aimed at synchronous collaboration. It allows groups to build documents together online.

<http://docs.google.com>

Google Docs is a free system that could be used to capture people's ideas. The spreadsheet tool could definitely be used for collective brainstorming.

Appendix B: Sample Emails

B-1



September 10, 2007

Dear Colleague:

As part of the community consultation process supporting the development of a local labour market plan for Niagara, we invite you to participate and contribute your views and recommendations in an on-line focus group discussion. This invitation-only focus group will be conducted from October 3 to October 12th using an on-line facilitation technology that allows you to participate without having to travel to a meeting location. This is a great opportunity to test this new technology while contributing to a very important plan for Niagara for the next 12-24 months.

Continuing to build on the 2005 Niagara Economic Growth Strategy, the local labour market plan is a key component to Niagara's strategy to address labour market challenges impacting our region. As a leader in our community, you are undoubtedly already aware of these workforce development challenges and thus your input is important:

- Shift in local economy
- Aging population
- Marginalized workforce
- Lower education attainment

Identifying solutions that will have the greatest impact and maximize resources is not an easy task. A scan of the region and the influencing factors on our economic and workforce development is an important step in the planning process. Evaluating trends, prioritizing the emerging issues and creating targeted solutions is the goal of this consultation process. As NTAB facilitates the Trends, Opportunities and Priorities (TOP) consultation process for 2007, we are committed to utilizing an approach that promotes greater engagement of those that see workforce development as a priority and can contribute to this decision making process. Niagara Economic Development Corporation supports this approach and is a contributing partner.

What is my commitment? As a community leader you and/or one designate in your organization are being invited to participate in this unique dialogue that eliminates travel time, promotes open, honest sharing of thoughts and ideas, and results in a prioritized and targeted local labour market action plan for the next 12-24 months for Niagara. The technology being used is internet based and enables you, through password access, to receive and respond at your convenience – preference is to answer questions daily. The commitment is about 15-20 minutes per day with the flexibility to choose the time and place when you respond. This resource will respect your time and your input, and comments will be anonymous.

At this time I ask that you please reply via email to tparsons@ntab.org or via phone to Trudy Parsons, Executive Director of NTAB at 905.641.0801 to confirm the participation of you and your designate.

What's the end result? The results will be shared with the community at a forum to be held on October 30th at which time people/organizations will have the opportunity to commit to action. The Trends, Opportunities and Priorities Report 2008 released in January 2008 by Niagara Training & Adjustment Board will be a culmination of the feedback gathered through this TOP process. It will be shared with all levels of government and the Niagara community to provide a documented labour market action plan with measurable goals, defined timelines and community champions.

NEDC and NTAB are committed to this initiative and to the development of our workforce as a key component to building a stronger Niagara.

We look forward to your contribution.

Appendix B-2

Niagara Training & Adjustment Board

Oct 1, 2007

Trends, Opportunities and Priorities in Niagara's Labour Market

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our on-line labour market discussion forum. I hope that you will find this a valuable opportunity to dialogue with other leaders about trends and issues in Niagara's labour market without ever leaving your desk.

As was noted in our original invitation, Niagara needs a labour force development strategy to work in tandem with a business development strategy - these are mutually dependent. This is your opportunity to assist with development of such a labour force development strategy for this region.

Key objectives for this discussion forum:

- engage participants in contributing to a labour force development strategy that supports municipal/regional business development strategies
- validate key issues impacting labour force development in the community of XXXXXX
- brainstorm and identify solutions that will impact on priority labour market development issues
- contribute to the Niagara Training & Adjustment Board's *TOP Report: Trends, Opportunities and Priorities in Niagara's Labour Market*

Expected outcomes:

- confirmation of key trends and issues impacting labour force development in XXXXXX
- identification of priority solutions to labour force development issues
- a demonstrated inclusive approach that links business and labour force development

How this on-line discussion forum works:

- **Go to website:** <http://www.ntab.flipspace.net>
- **Login:** Your email address
- **Password:** XXXXXXXX (all lower case)
You are encouraged to visit the site and enter the "play" area to gain a greater understanding of just how easy it is to participate!

Wednesday, October 3 - 11, 2007:

Daily you will receive a notice that includes the hyperlink to the site (for easy access), informing you that a new question has been posted. The subject for the email will be NTAB – Niagara labour force development planning 2007. You are encouraged to visit the site when you have a few minutes and add your comments and review those of others. Questions and discussion from previous days remain posted so that you will be able to go back to review this information for reference purposes.

Friday, October 12, 2007:

You will receive an evaluation form that will capture your feedback on your experience using this on-line focus group technology.

Steps to access:

1. To access the website, click on Internet Explorer and go to <http://www.ntab.flipspace.net>
2. Click on the "Login" button.
3. Your **User Name** is **your email address** - the one to which this email has been sent.
4. Your **Password** is: XXXXXXXX (all lower case). You can choose to change this once you have logged in for the first time.
5. Please take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the space. Click the link titled **click here to learn about using this site**, and click on each of the links within that page.
6. Click the **Home** button in the bottom right hand corner of the site to return to the main page.
7. Finally, click on the **Play Page** link and try adding a few ideas. In the bottom tool bar there is a refresh button which allows you to refresh the screen and view other comments as they are entered.
8. Starting Wednesday morning and each time you visit the site, you need to click on the link titled **Niagara labour force development planning 2007**. This brings you into the space that we will be working from.

Viewing the information in the community forum:

- Every time a new topic or idea is generated, it will appear to the far left on the screen. As others add their thoughts and suggestions under that idea, you will see they are slightly indented and appear in different colors. This allows you to see how ideas build one upon the other.
- The question response should be in short bullets. It is not necessary to write a lot of information – just capture your thought. This process should only take about 15-20 minutes of your time each day.
- Questions and prompts will be emailed periodically to generate ongoing discussion. In order to participate, you must go on-line and respond to the questions. The questions accumulate providing opportunity to go back to a previous question at any time. **We encourage you to build on ideas of others and add comments freely. All ideas will be anonymous.**
- Effective Friday October 12th, 2007 at 5:00 p.m., the site will be closed.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Trudy Parsons at tparsons@ntab.org or by phone at 905.641.0801 or John Sedgwick of Managing Imaginations Inc. to assist in the use of this technology.

The information and solutions collected will be analyzed and prepared into a community labour force plan that will be presented at **NTAB's TOP Community Forum on October 30, 2007**. You will receive an invitation to participate at this forum. At this time we bring the broader community together to:

- hear the results of the complete research and consultation process,
- gain knowledge of sector specific supply and demand challenges
- prioritize the actions, and
- commit to the implementation process.

On behalf of Niagara Training & Adjustment Board, please accept our thanks and appreciation for taking the time to share your knowledge, views and ideas through this process.

Yours truly,
Trudy Parsons, Executive Director
Niagara Training & Adjustment Board

Appendix B-3

Questions for Flip Space Discussion 2007

Email text: Thank you for agreeing to participate in our on-line community consultation process which will run from October 3-12th. I hope that you will find this a valuable opportunity to dialogue with other leaders in the community about local labour market development without ever leaving your desk.

The Niagara Training & Adjustment Board tracks **trends** in the labour market and works to identify priority actions to influence positive impact. You have received our backgrounder on recent changes in the local labour market. Review of literature, both national and local, complimented by local census information and other statistical research paints a picture of Niagara and situates within the broader Canadian context. Trends in Niagara's labour market do not change demonstrably from one year to the next.

Steps to access:

1. To access the website, click on Internet Explorer and go to <http://www.ntab.flipspace.net>
2. Click on the "Login" button.
3. Your **User Name** is **your email address** - the one to which this email has been sent.
4. Your **Password** is: XXXXXXXX (all lower case). You can choose to change this once you have logged in for the first time.
5. Each time you visit the site, you need to click on the link titled **labour force development planning 2007**. This brings you into the space that we will be working from.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Trudy Parsons at tparsons@ntab.org or by phone at 905.641.0801 or John Sedgwick of Managing Imaginations Inc. at sedgwick@vaxxine.com to assist in the use of this technology.

A similar email should go out each morning including the steps to access and encouraging people to take the time to participate.

Day 1: October 3, 2007

Descriptor box: A trend is any long term change in social and/or economic direction, broad in scope and identified by many sources; a general direction that the labour market is taking over time. **Please comment on each or any of the following trends that have emerged. Add any trend that you think needs exploring at this time.**

Trend 1: Shift in Local Economy

- Is Niagara's economy still experiencing an economic restructuring, shifting away from a traditional manufacturing base; if so, towards what sectors and what indicators do you see that confirm this?

Trend 2: Aging population

- Stats Canada identifies Niagara as being the 4th oldest population in Canada. What impact do you think the aging population is having on our local labour force?

Trend 3: Rising skills levels/credentials demanded by employers

- Are the skill levels/credentials demanded by employers continuing to rise and if so, in which occupation groups or sectors?

Trend 4: Marginalized workforce

- Are the skills and talents of specific workforce groups (e.g. immigrants, persons with disabilities, women, aboriginals, youth) inadequately integrated into the local labour market and if so, what is the impact on the labour force?

Trend 5: Workforce competition is fostering increased employer engagement

- Are employers engaging in more innovative strategies to meet their workforce needs (attract and retain workers), and if so, in what ways is this happening in Niagara?

Day 2: October 4

Headline: Issues attached to the trends

Descriptor box: Related to each of the trends identified on Day 1 are a number of specific issues. **Issue statements** (i.e. who is being affected and how), can be broadly stated and may have finer nuances related to specific targets or populations.

Please provide the issues you think are significant, and comment on issues posted by others. All ideas are welcome and final wording will come later.

What is the specific impact of these trends on XXXXXX's labour market? (be sure to identify who is being affected and how)

We will leave this open to the group to identify. We will monitor throughout the day and if we see key issues not being identified, there is the opportunity for us to input them so they are not lost – this will allow participants to validate (or not) these issues.

Day 3: October 5

Headline: Prioritizing the issues that relate to strategic priorities for the city – where do we start?

Descriptor box: Your input on issues resulted in the following list of issues being confirmed. Please prioritize these based on your understanding of community need.

This will be a special ranking page

Day 4: October 9

Headline: Action Planning

Descriptor box: We now need to create a community plan of action – labour market solutions – that will address these prioritized issues. **Solutions should be practical and achievable and focus on addressing a particular issue.** When you consider solutions please consider the fact that these activities can be conducted in partnership and engage one or more sectors and/or community agencies and may be accomplished in stages or phases.

Questions such as the one below will have to be developed once we have the prioritized issues after 3.

“What specific actions can you suggest to address the issue of apprenticeship opportunities in businesses lagging the demand from young people for entry into the skilled trades?”

What specific actions can you suggest for...

Day 5: October 10

Headline: More on action planning

Descriptor box: Please continue to provide your thinking on the best way to get community action on these key issues.

Day 6: October 11

The following is the list of solutions that you have identified to address issues as you have prioritized them. The final step in our consultation process is to establish priority actions. This will allow us to focus our energy and our resources to achieve maximum impact. Please prioritize these actions placing high priority on those that should be implemented over the next 12 months.

Day 7: October 12

Evaluation – SurveyMonkey

Appendix C: Communiqué/Flyer



The Benefits of Meeting On-Line

- removes barriers of travel and meeting schedules
- allows for anonymity
- requires only 15 to 30 minutes per day
- supports discussion and dialogue in a flexible and time saving manner
- promotes a creative problem-solving approach
- promotes increased participation in a decision-making process
- creates an avenue for increased input in an open, non-restrictive, non-intrusive environment
- promotes open, honest, equal participation and sharing of thoughts and ideas
- creates opportunity for increased participation of key stakeholders in the decision-making process



Who should use it?

- any organization or company that calls meetings where travel or participation may pose a challenge
- cost conscious groups
- groups requiring inclusive input and/or consensus
- idea generating and problem solving groups

What is it?

Flipospace® is a professionally facilitated, creative problem solving tool using an on-line format.

Flipospace® significantly improves the classic approach of attempting to bring everyone to a central table for a series of meetings.

Flipospace® demonstrates increased participation and effectiveness of key stakeholders in a dialogue, through a problem-solving and decision-making process.

Flipospace® can approach complex issues, allowing participants to discuss research findings, identify issues/opportunities, generate ideas, evaluate solutions and finally allocate resources to an action plan.

Flipospace® can run over time with new questions & discussions daily with participants responding to posted issues or questions.

For more information:

Trudy Parsons, Executive Director

Niagara Training &
Adjustment Board

905-641-0801 ntab@ntab.org



Niagara Training & Adjustment Board
le Conseil de formation et d'adaptation
de la main d'oeuvre de Niagara

**EMPLOYMENT
ONTARIO**

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funded by the Ontario Government