

Jean-Pierre (JP) Giroux – Revamping Canadian Manufacturing: The Role of EMC in Driving Innovation

Host: Maggie John

Overview:

Jean-Pierre (JP) Giroux joins us to discuss how the manufacturing industry is changing to accommodate new technologies and a rapidly changing workforce. For more than two decades, JP has held positions of increasing responsibility with economic development, NGO, management consulting, industrial and corporate organizations throughout Canada. Beginning as an economic development officer in Canada's Capital Region, JP has devoted the past 20 years developing innovative workplace performance-based solutions for the Canadian manufacturing sector. Giroux shares some of the key challenges Canadian manufacturers face in adopting new technology and how they can overcome these barriers.

Highlights from our conversation include:

1. Canadian manufacturers face significant challenges in adopting new technologies, such as automation, robotics, and digitalization, which are crucial for advanced manufacturing. Overcoming these barriers requires substantial investment and the ability to manage change, including upskilling the workforce to transition from old to new roles.
2. Creating inclusive work environments and attracting diverse talent are also major concerns, especially with an impending wave of retirements coming in the next ten years. To address labor shortages, manufacturers aim to appeal to women and individuals with disabilities by engaging with the next generation in schools.
3. Maintaining strong connections between school boards, high schools, and local industries is vital, particularly in rural communities, to ensure the sector's sustainability.

MAGGIE:

It's Magnet Network Live, and we are here with J.P. Giroux.

He leads EMC, Excellence in Manufacturing, an organization that provides manufacturers with resources and support to improve their operational efficiency and competitiveness.

His focus is on helping Canadian manufacturers adapt to technological changes and foster innovation within the industry. JP, thank you for joining me today.

JP:

Great pleasure.

MAGGIE:

Have you had a chance to attend some of the sessions here?

JP:

Yes, I arrived in the afternoon yesterday.

MAGGIE:

What's been your biggest takeaway from the conversations you've been a part of.

JP:

I have to say, I really like the spirit, the spirit of collaboration and the willingness of the partnership, the people in the room to try to get involved.

So it's just a good spirit all around.

MAGGIE:

So it's funny, a lot of people have been talking about the collaboration.

Do you find that that doesn't happen as much? Or maybe people are working in so many silos that there's not enough time to look up and realize, oh, wait a minute, we're working cohesively. We're working together on this.

JP:

I think partnership is overused. But to answer your question, I think we're seeing more and more.

I think collaboration in our sector, in our own ecosystem is at an all-time high.

It grows organizations. We're seeing a lot of innovation coming out of it, but it's also at the same time, like we all have our day jobs and how to invest, how to maintain it, how to make it work, make it work from a business modeled perspective as well.

It's a big conversation right now.

MAGGIE:

On that note, what are some key challenges Canadian manufacturers face in adopting new technologies and how can they overcome some of those barriers?

JP:

We're facing major change in the sector.

Advanced manufacturing is one of the number one priority in the sector...how to adopt.

Here I'm talking about automation, robotics, digitalization.

There's also investment that comes with it.

Capacity to change. Also, everything around the shift of the work.

If you start adopting technology, that means your work is shifting and the repetitive nature of things or tasks or routine are moving into shift with your resources.

So what do you do with the people that were doing these jobs, how you upskill the labor force to get them involved in other work, more creative work.

So this is definitely an interesting time for small and medium sized [businesses] in manufacturing.

MAGGIE:

Tell me a little bit about Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium and what you do and how you see that fit into what we were just talking about?

JP:

So the work or the foundational work we do is we work with a company at the regional level.

So we're set up in a consortium where manufacturers come together.

And talking about collaboration, we were designed to help manufacturers to solve problems among themselves.

So people actually come to EMC, and we're a membership-based organization.

They come, and our job is to facilitate this consortium, what we call peer-to-peer networking.

They come also to benchmark themselves where they are compared to each other.

And what we try to do, and this is our secret sauce, is have them solve problems among themselves.

And so we exchange best practices. And the bulk of our work also is to do this in consortium fashion and look for common interests.

So we run consortium on energy, on green manufacturing, on training.

Training is a big, upskilling is a big conversation where we would start cohorts on leadership training, supervisory skills, and other teams as well.

So that's kind of how we're set up, and we do a lot of initiative with the government as well.

MAGGIE:

On that note then, how can manufacturing businesses create more inclusive environments that support the growth and development of diverse talent within the sector as well?

JP:

This is a big, big, big conversation. I would say in the last three, four years, the company has started to embrace this notion of being an employer of choice.

And, and you have to, you have to, to think historically, I mean, we, we, we were, we were the landing place for a lot of new Canadian historically, like when we built the railroad and we built Canada and there was always like, and, and...

You know, the manufacturing sector is also very heavily established in rural Canada.

So we've been seeing shift over the last 20 years, but more recently, our employers are looking at how they can position themselves as an employer of choice in their community.

And what I mean by that is having a very progressive way to appeal to new Canadians, but that's also including the next generation, the youth. There's a huge shift that's going to happen in our sector.

About 20% will actually move into retirement.

So this is, in Canada, this is about 400,000 people in the next 10 years.

So we're working with employers to say, okay, so how are you addressing succession planning?

How are you appealing to women in manufacturing?

Women in manufacturing is about 26%. Okay. So we talk a lot about labor shortages. Like if we would bring this up to 35%, we would solve a lot of this.

We're also looking at how companies are onboarding people with disability.

That's about 4%...60,000 of our employees in manufacturing have some form of disability.

So we're working on that aspect, too, and how to use this pool of talent that was on tap, really.

So these are some of the area we're working on.

MAGGIE:

I love this term employer of choice.

Yeah. Because for so many years, JP, it's just you get a job. You're just happy to have a job. And now to consciously think, do I want to work for this organization? Have they created space for me? What are some of those conversations, questions that potential employees are asking of potential employers when it comes to deciding, is this the employer of my choice?

JP:

It's funny because I was in Moncton on Tuesday. We had a meeting with 200 manufacturers and we had the next generation on stage and we were interviewing them to see what's important for them. And I'll tell you, one of the big words that came out is respect. They want an employer that respects them as an individual. But this is something that I'm not saying relatively new, but it's coming directly. And I'm talking about these are students that were maybe 15, 16 years old. And we're making a huge move right now to how to seduce them, how to attract them.

Early. Early, as early as 16, 17. Now we're actually investing to go into elementary school. Wow. Like this is a very progressive work that we're doing in just starting to talk about career awareness with teachers. Do these micro activity, like spend an hour in a plant, right? Do a plant tour. Just talk with business executive people and talk about career. But it's a big shift. We see it as the future of the sector.

We believe if employers are not investing to position themselves locally, to be attractive to new generation, new Canadians, their business is completely at risk. And we don't have to talk much on this. Employers are coming on side and want to be involved. And they have to do a lot of work as well to tweak how they're onboarding.

Because right now, we're placing a lot of these students in the workplace. And the onboarding is 100% critical for retention. If the actual individual will stay in the business.

MAGGIE:

Do you see other industries being this aggressive with reaching out to young people earlier and earlier? Or are you finding manufacturing is something that maybe young people are not necessarily thinking first of? And so you kind of have to have early adoption, early access to kind of have it something that young people are starting to think more about.

JP:

It's a good point. If I see it, responding to your question, I don't see other sector being as proactive as we are. And I could tell you, because we're, like I said, most of our industry is located in rural Canada. And how important it is for these communities to keep their employees. And like, think about a pulp and paper or a sawmill or food processors.

MAGGIE:

That's the local economy.

JP:

That's the local economy. So building that bridge, which sometimes you can assume that this connectivity is happening, but it's not. EMC has been very progressive or very proactive, I should say, to try to build that bridge between the school boards, the high school and the local industry to establish. And we do this. It makes sense for us to do this as an association because no individual company have the resources to do this.

MAGGIE:

Thank you so much, JP. This has been really insightful.

JP:

Thank you. Thank you. It was a great pleasure.

MAGGIE:

That was JP Giroux. He is the president of Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium.