



THE **BIG SHIFT** →

Foundational Discovery Roundtable

Feb 18, 2025

Hosted by: TELUS

Our Sponsors: TELUS, CTR, Assignment TV, SalesChoice, Southern Harbour Ltd., and Food Mamba

RSI Team:

Writers: Madelyn Webb & Jayden Kuzdak

Strategist: Yasmin Glanville

Creative Director: Jason MacFarlane

Graphic Designer: Adam Hermosilla



THE **BIG SHIFT** →

The **BIG SHIFT** is more than a useful phrase to get your attention. It represents the tsunami of disruptions impacting business, society, and our environment and an urgent call for action! Taking part in the BIG SHIFT is an opportunity to explore key change drivers and how we can become ready for that future.

“I liked how the roundtable emphasized the need to bridge the gaps between the challenges.”

The Rethink Sustainability Initiatives (RSI) BIG SHIFT Roundtable series brings together senior and emerging leaders from business, and civil society to explore and prepare for the converging impacts of social, technological, environmental, economic, and geopolitical disruptions.

We invite you to join the conversation, share ideas, and shape a thriving future - before the future shapes you.

RSI'S DISCOVERY ROUNDTABLE

As part of our mandate to bring together a cross-sector of forward-thinking leaders and change-makers to participate in solution-focused initiatives, RSI launched the BIG SHIFT initiative with a Discovery Roundtable on February 18, 2025.





EXPLORE. ASSESS. PREPARE.

EXPLORE the disruptions

ASSESS the disruptions

PREPARE for the disruptions

The Purpose To explore key disruptions impacting Canada, business, society, and our environment. To collaboratively identify actionable ideas for preparing for the Big Shifts and thriving into the future starting now!

Our discussions were informed, in part, by the Government of Canada's *Disruption on the Horizon* 2024 report and The Canadian Chamber of Commerce¹². This served to guide discussions on the broad and interconnecting drivers of change that will disrupt Canadian business and society. Roundtable conversations provided a platform for forward-thinking leaders and experts to express their concerns for the future, discuss how it will impact their personal and organizational circumstances, and dialogue with others to explore collaborative solutions.

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

RSI is proud to build upon its historical success as a thoughtful convenor and mobilizer of leaders and future thinkers. The Foundational Discovery Session was no exception to this trend. Experienced business leaders, social and cleantech entrepreneurs, academics, artists, and scientists were in attendance, sharing a wealth of knowledge and perspectives - highlighting the power of collaboration. This included participants from the University of Toronto, AssignmentTV, York University, Graywood, Sweeny&Co, CTR, Climate Change Consulting, Mindsuite, Crown Realty Partners, Food Mamba, Canadian Wildlife Federation, and Southern Harbour Ltd.

1. https://horizons.service.canada.ca/en/2024/disruptions/Disruptions_on_the_Horizon_2024_report.pdf
2. <https://chamber.ca/news/the-cost-of-canada-u-s-trade-disruption-on-full-display-with-new-trade-tracker/>



SPEAKERS



OLIVIER CAPPON

RSI VICE-CHAIR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ENERVA

Oliver opened the session by outlining some of the greatest economic and geopolitical disruptions facing Canada, including trade tariffs and questions about the country's sovereignty. While Canada has historically benefited from its geography, natural resources, and proximity to the U.S., it now faces significant challenges such as low GDP growth and weak labour productivity. He notes that addressing these issues requires strategic investment in workforce development, particularly in energy efficiency and decarbonization, to enhance productivity and economic resilience. Beyond labour markets, he believes that opportunities exist to diversify trade, break down internal trade barriers, attract foreign investment, and refine immigration policy to better align with economic and cultural goals. In his final remarks, Olivier encouraged attendees to engage in active dialogue, leveraging diverse perspectives to develop scalable solutions that enhance Canada's competitiveness, economic diversity, and global role.















YASMIN GLANVILLE

RSI FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR
FUTURIST AND CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER CTR INC.

Yasmin spoke about the change drivers, emphasizing that all significant societal changes present both challenges and opportunities that emerge from our response to undesired impacts. To be better prepared we need to broaden our perspectives and explore the interconnections of disruptors while we collaborate with other leaders to discover or co-create solutions that allow us to adapt ahead of change. In other words, become future-ready. Yasmin urged the audience to take a systems approach: develop an evidence-based understanding of foreseeable disruptions, and how they impact us, both professionally and personally, and; look to innovation, and collaboration to shape the future.

“Work begins in the margins when people start acting. It is time to shift from just talking about solutions to getting things done!”

Top Disruptors Shaping the BIG SHIFT in Canada:

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Trade (e.g., Trade War) |  Artificial Intelligence |
|  Geopolitics |  Ageing Population |
|  Cybersecurity |  Climate Change/Extreme Weather Events |
|  Food and Housing Insecurity |  Mental Health Crisis |
|  Innovation Gap ³ |  Economic Volatility |

“From the perspective of an architect involved in the broader real estate sector, I believe the ongoing disruptions caused by the pandemic and climate change remain critical. The office and retail markets are still unbalanced, and meeting green building standards has become increasingly challenging.”

3.The lack of support needed to drive innovation in Canada, including investments and training in commercializing inventions, products and startups.





DR. CINDY GORDON

CEO, SALESCHOICE

Dr. Gordon provided an overview of major disruptors set to impact Canada both broadly and at the community level. She pointed to the agenda of the current U.S. federal administration, worsening mental health, AI, cybersecurity, information weaponization (misinformation), and the decline in Canadian innovation and commercialization of inventions as the most pressing challenges. Her vision of the future is shaped by her understanding of the transformative impact of AI development and proliferation. AI will continue to progress faster than the legislation can keep pace. Her comments emphasized the need for decision-makers to refocus and act with a sense of urgency that has been lacking in proportion to the nation's growing challenges. Yet, despite these concerns, she maintained a hopeful and confident tone, reminding attendees to "hug the trees" to keep a healthy perspective in an increasingly chaotic environment.

"Where is our focus!? Are we really forward-thinking if there are more ethical standards overseeing the production of a toothbrush than AI products?"



DISCOVERY SESSION: BREAKOUT GROUPS

Following the speaker presentations, BIG SHIFT participants worked together in small breakout groups to discuss the impacts of future disruptors. This exercise was an opportunity to discover how disruptors and their impacts are better understood when multiple perspectives are engaged. Here's the exercise:

- 1 Start with an honest look into the near future. What are the biggest shifts you envision happening to Canada and its place in the world from now to 2030? All perspectives, from community to global are welcomed.
- 2 Choose a specific industry/sector and focus level (Canada or community)
- 3 Identify the key disruptors for that industry/sector and discuss their impacts, considering various perspectives (e.g., private/public, political, social, economic, environmental)
- 4 Discuss the requirements to be prepared for future disruptors (future readiness) and explore strategies to transform your risk into an opportunity to thrive, under new circumstances. It's time to explore what we want our BIG SHIFT to look like.

Each group captured a summary of disruptors and future readiness actions, which was presented to all attendees in a final plenary session. The topics explored by the groups were the built environment, Canadian agriculture, and Canadian business and innovation. Two out of three groups discussed disruptors' impacts on communities and brought forward future readiness actions to fundamentally challenge how we design, organize, and live joyfully in our communities.

“As someone in a specialized field, it was refreshing to hear alternative perspectives on common challenges.”

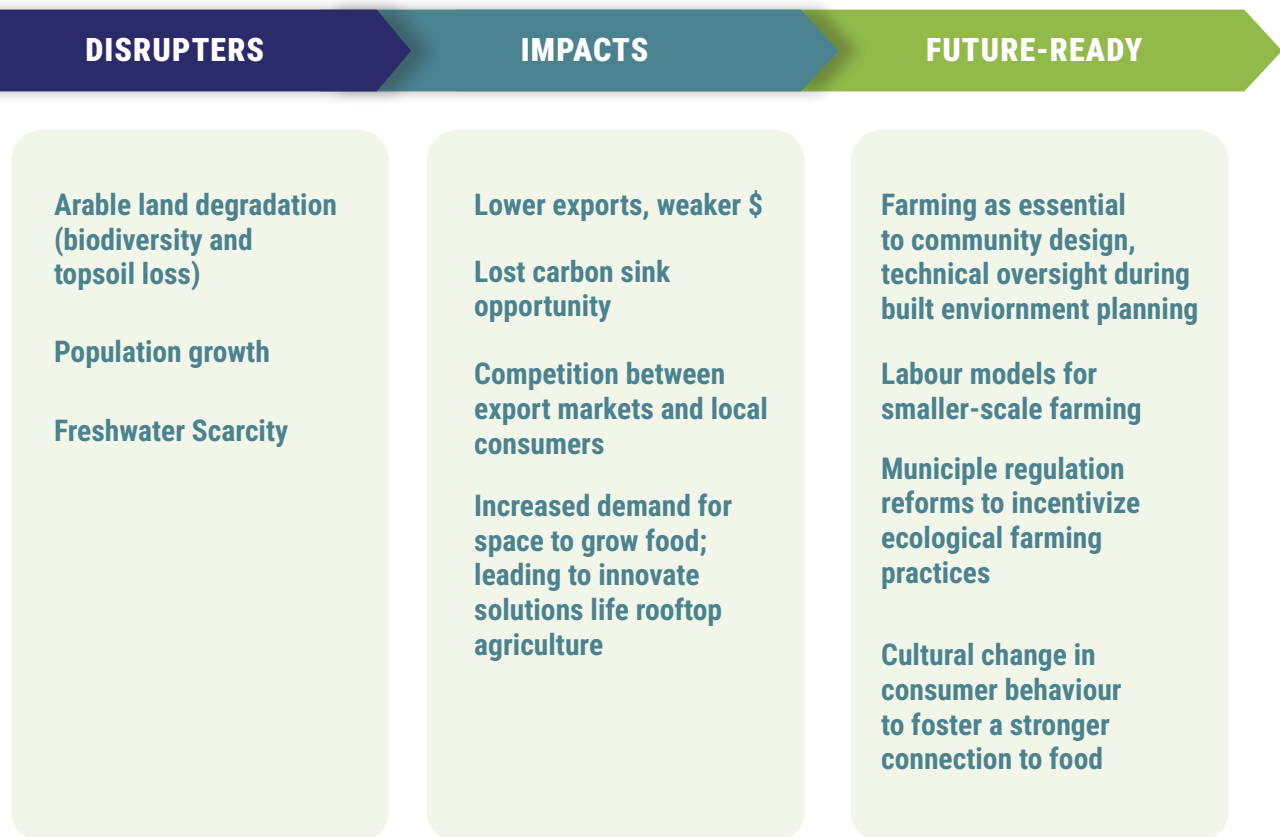
Despite focusing on largely different topics, as each group presented and added context to our vision of Canada five years out, their interconnections became apparent - so too did the interconnections between disruptors. It was easy to see how our ability to strategize future readiness actions improved as new perspectives were added to a common understanding. Each group's presentation was a demonstration to the audience that although disruptors carry negative risks, they also stimulate new visions for a future that can serve us better.



Canadian Agriculture

This group discussed the challenges facing Canada's agricultural industry, including arable land degradation, population growth, and freshwater scarcity. The impact of these disruptors could be seen in weakened exports, increased competition for food resources, and a rise in demand for innovative farming methods like rooftop and vertical farming. Solutions emphasized recognizing agriculture as essential infrastructure, integrating it into urban planning, and reforming policies to promote sustainable land use. The group proposed investments in small-scale farming, urban regeneration projects that incorporate food production, and reducing the reliance on petrochemicals in agriculture to boost resilience and food security.

Breakout Example:



Built Environment for Community

This group identified climate change and the collapse of biodiversity as top-of-mind disruptors. The discussion centred on the need for community space and whether this might be provided by transforming some of the underused buildings in Toronto. The issue of reasonably priced space where the community can gather and artists work has been raised in the past. Solutions addressed the roles of various stakeholders including building owners, City Hall, for policy and zoning changes, and architects who would be called upon to transform existing space. As new buildings are going up around Toronto, the group envisioned adding new, multipurpose spaces.

Business Innovation

New threats from the U.S. helped to focus this conversation. Canada has been good at innovation in the past, but the commercialization of new ideas needs to be improved to reap the economic benefits. Scarcity, even desperation, were seen as environments where innovation can thrive but so far have not been drivers for Canadian innovators. Perhaps we might learn from the experience of newcomers and artists to develop more 'out of the box' approaches to new problems.

“In my daily work, I see people get stuck focusing on isolated issues, overlooking how everything is connected, which leads them to miss out on creative solutions and innovation.”



OPEN FLOOR DISCUSSION

Overcoming BIG SHIFT Barriers

New threats from the U.S. helped to focus this conversation. Canada has been good at innovation in the past, but the commercialization of new ideas needs to be improved to reap the economic benefits. Scarcity, even desperation, were seen as environments where innovation can thrive but so far have not been drivers for Canadian innovators. Perhaps we might learn from the experience of newcomers and artists to develop more 'out of the box' approaches to new problems.

BIG IDEAS AND CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME IN PREPARING FOR THE BIG SHIFT

Collaboration

A recurrent theme to overcome these barriers was collaboration among diverse groups, focusing on commonalities rather than differences. Purpose-focused collaboration promotes unity around a shared vision and action, rather than reacting to ongoing changes. This approach encouraged participants to focus on what unites them in pursuit of a collective future.

"I like how the roundtable laid the groundwork for change by connecting silos around a shared problem and advocating for more voices in that conversation."

Lack of Accountability for Innovation Inaction

Participants questioned whether Canadian executives felt the same sense of urgency for innovation as those in countries driven by necessity, such as India and China. Innovation, they noted, often emerges from struggle, and without similar pressures in Canada, the drive for frugal innovation may not be as strong.

Funding for Future Readiness

The discussion also touched on the challenges faced by Canadian startups, where securing funding often comes at the cost of giving away significant equity. Topics like waste diversion and decarbonization also arose, with a focus on areas where innovation could have a major impact. Ideas such as establishing a national innovation fund and inviting artists into these discovery spaces alongside business leaders were also explored to inspire creative solutions.



WRAP-UP

The **Foundational Discovery Roundtable** served as a critical first step in fostering dialogue among leaders from diverse industries and backgrounds about the pressing disruptions shaping Canada’s future. Through expert insights, collaborative discussions, and interactive breakout sessions, participants explored the interconnected impacts of economic, environmental, technological, and societal shifts.

A key takeaway was the need to move beyond passive awareness into proactive, **future-ready strategies**—leveraging innovation, collaboration, and policy adaptation to turn risks into opportunities. The roundtable discussions underscored the power of cross-sector partnerships, emphasizing that **collective action is essential to navigate an era of unprecedented change**.

“That sense of involvement and co-creation gave the group real momentum and set the stage for the next phase of the BIG SHIFT project.”

The event also highlighted the urgency of addressing structural barriers—such as lagging legislation, political inertia, and limited innovation incentives—while reinforcing the potential for collaborative activism as a means to drive positive change. Participants agreed that the BIG SHIFT is already underway, and the choice remains: **react to change or actively shape the future**. RSI’s event series will continue to provide a platform for forward-thinking leaders to co-create solutions that ensure Canada thrives amid disruption.



THE **BIG SHIFT** →

THANK YOU TO OUR
BIG SHIFT SPONSORS AND PARTNERS



SalesChoice

Assignment TV



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION

If you are interested in discussing this report, learning more about Big Shift challenges, solutions, and opportunities for collaboration, sharing your own action-focused insights or other partnership opportunities, send us a note at:

Communication@Rethinksustainability.ca

To learn more about Rethink Sustainability Initiatives (RSI) The Knowledge Exchange Leadership Roundtables, visit:

<https://rethinksustainability.ca/>

About Rethink Sustainability

RSI is a trusted “Think & Do” organization and convener of action partners for leaders, organizations, and communities, from Canada and abroad to collaborate on reimagining and mobilizing sustainability and resilience building solutions to thrive into the future. Together, we explore and create actionable solutions to major challenges impacting businesses, institutions and communities and civic society.

Our Network

Industry leaders from Canada, USA, Denmark, France, UK and around the world.



Learn more at <https://rethinksustainability.ca/>