

Section 2

Life Stories of Facilitators

Many different categories and types of facilitators work with entrepreneurs, on different aspects of management, technology or other aspects of organizational and market development. For the purposes of this book, the focus was placed on highly creative facilitators who devise innovative managerial processes to support an entrepreneurial project.

Almost all successful entrepreneurs are supported by one or more facilitators who play a key role in their projects. This was the case for Coco Chanel, especially in the early part of her career, when she received support from Balsan and Boy, both of whom were her mentors and coaches for many years. Later the Wertheimer brothers helped her to market her perfume. The same applies to Alain Bouchard, who surrounded himself with three facilitators who made major contributions to support him and bring his vision to fruition.

Today, entrepreneurship is as much a team activity as an individual one. New ventures are increasingly created by teams that include facilitators. These people are mostly process innovators who are usually more like collaborators (in the true sense of the word) than aides. Many become partners who share or have a stake in the firm's ownership.

Facilitation is a complex, multidimensional task. A facilitator must first understand the entrepreneur's vision and be familiar with the organization and its resources, and with the sector, the competitors, the markets and the technology.

Entrepreneurs and facilitators maintain different types of relationships. For example, the entrepreneur will express visions and ideas, and the facilitator will work to make them happen. Or the facilitator will propose ideas and/or innovations that the entrepreneur uses as inspiration to adjust the vision. These are the most common types, and there are, of course, different degrees and levels of collaboration.

The entrepreneur-facilitator relationship may follow different patterns. Three patterns in particular stand out: secrecy, discretion and tactics. A pattern of secrecy would apply to a relationship where the entrepreneur and facilitator talk about ideas or projects that they do not want to disclose to anyone else, inside or outside the firm, including potential acquirers.

The pattern of secrecy would also include 'silent design' of new products and contacts with potential new clients, subcontractors or suppliers. A pattern of discretion is similar to a pattern of secrecy, with the addition of people being informed inside or outside the firm. As for a pattern of tactics, this would include exploratory action by the facilitator following conversations with the

entrepreneur to obtain information or assess potential reactions within the firm or sector, or on social media.

Facilitators must be inventive and resourceful, since they will be asked to solve difficult problems and devise original solutions to ensure that the entrepreneur's innovations are successful. Facilitators often become experts in achieving activities that require fewer resources than is usually the case in the sector. They are imaginative, structured and can work with both judgement and finesse.

They must often do things that most other people in the firm would consider impossible. They are inventive thinkers, able to propose approaches and methods that will make a difference in realizing the entrepreneur's vision and, by extension, in the firm's performance. They are usually fairly quick to assess and evaluate situations and to act. Some work closely with their entrepreneur; this is the case for Réal Plourde. Others work outside the entrepreneur's sphere of activity; this is the case for Pierre Nelis.

Réal Plourde

Réal Plourde helped to oil the Couche-Tard/Circle K machine for Alain Bouchard, speeding up the pace of acquisitions and smoothing out the integration of newly acquired chains. As an engineer and MBA graduate with extensive international experience, he brought considerable added value to Alain Bouchard's team. Among other things, he helped to train many of the organization's senior executives, including the current CEO, Brian Hannasch, who joined the company in 2001, working closely with Réal Plourde for nearly a decade before replacing him as Head of Operations in 2011 and ultimately taking over from Alain Bouchard as CEO in 2014.

Although officially retired for some years now, Réal Plourde continues to sit on the boards of several organizations. He also Chairs the board of an engineering firm employing more than 2,000 engineers. His Foundation has received several awards for its social and community contributions.

Pierre Nelis

Pierre Nelis joined a small group of artists working for a creative entrepreneur who had invented software to produce movies. He brought a great deal of marketing expertise to a team of technology creators, and it was this that ultimately allowed the firm to sell its software to movie industry leaders throughout the world. The firm – Softimage – was bought by Microsoft, which hired Pierre Nelis to oversee the integration process and later to develop new communications products. Nelis has an outstanding ability to identify the elements needed by a firm to become more effective, and this led him to set up a one-of-a-kind external facilitation programme that went on to become a model for many business growth support organizations throughout the world, but especially in North America and Europe.