

## SECTION 5

# Making Sense of the Findings through Various Models

This section of the report may be useful for readers who are looking for models to use that foster partnership development in their own associations, groups, or organizations. Since no program model existed at the outset of the Business and Labour Partnership Program, this section attempts to interpret aspects of the findings through six models or lenses. These were purposely chosen to illustrate a broad range of perspectives that could be used to understand the intricate processes and strategies of partnership development.

“How can creativity and innovation be done in rigid frameworks?”

LITERACY EXPERT

There are two main parts to this section. Using the data from the case study, the first part begins with three different types of interpretations which are drawn from the partnership development literature. Since various disciplines explore the details of this concept in different ways, a cross section of the literature was selected from comparative education research, community-based participatory research, and public policy research.

In the first model, The Partnership Development Continuum, the reader will see how the Business and Labour Partnership Program moved across a continuum that met partner organizations at their own particular stage and time of development. The second model, Partnership Working, provides the reader with a generic framework for examining the key ingredients of how the Business and Labour Partnership Program worked. Another lens in the section is referred to as Group Dynamics Within Partnerships. This model provides the reader with a way of viewing partnership effectiveness through group dynamics.

The next part continues the interpretation, but through the lens of program planning models in adult education. Again, three different

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approaches are used to illustrate different perspectives, planning issues, and roles and behaviours of partner members. In the Conceptual Programming Model, the reader is provided with a macro-level analysis of how the Business and Labour Partnership Program operated. This is followed by a discussion of the Interactive Model of Program Planning. Here, the reader can see how certain steps were taken to form a partnership and an individual workplace project. The final lens, Negotiation Model of Program Planning, provides the reader with a viewpoint of how the Business and Labour Partnership Program worked within the context of power relations. It is important to note that these six models and interpretations are not intended to assess how well the Program performed, but more to provide a variety of viewpoints that could be considered, or might be similar to the contexts of readers involved in the journey of partnership development.

### The Partnership Development Continuum

This model is based on the idea that the optimal relationship in any partnership process is one that recognizes that members have needs and local realities at a particular stage and time in their organizational development (Mullinix, 2001). It also recognizes that if co-ordinated efforts and goals are to be attained, there needs to be a strategic movement along a partnership continuum. This three-phase continuum includes: pre-partnership, partnership, and Partnership. Nine dimensions or indicators of partnership relations that vary across the continuum were also identified and appear as Figure 1. These dimensions map across the partnership continuum and form a fluid matrix that may help explain the fostering of partnerships within the NLS Business and Labour Partnership Program.

FIGURE 1 – PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM

Dimensions	pre-partnership	partnership	Partnership
Focus of interaction			
Activities/projects			
Time and orientation			
Benefit			
Trust and respect			
Organizational structures			
Organizational strategies			
Locus of influence			
Written agreements			

***The First Phase — pre-partnership***

During this stage on the continuum, the focus of interaction was to bring business and labour organizations together for the first time. This was a feature characterized throughout the foundation building years (1988–1995). An example of such a partnership type was the one formed between the United Food and Commercial Workers and Algonquin College to develop a workplace tool called Literacy Task Analysis. These initial interactions were mostly facilitated through the NLS personnel involved in the Business and Labour Partnership Program. The project activities were based on local needs and specifically defined relationships among members, so they could become acquainted with each other’s organizations. To start with,

the length and time of these associations were more of a pilot stage nature but project objectives were specific enough to start the knowledge-building process. The benefits were the important network exchanges that took place among these newly formed partnerships and the recognition of the skills and knowledge each member organization could bring to a specific workplace literacy challenge.

“At the end of the partnership, you come out with something that’s bigger than any of us.”

LABOUR EXPERT

During the pre-partnership, there was a focus on building trust and earning respect for a different organizational approach to the same issue or problem. Even though member organizational structures remained autonomous, different strategies from each partner were brought to the table to complete the projects or activities. This new information was shared among member organizations, and the different partners began to recognize how project results influenced their own interests as well as each other’s.

Written agreements were made between the funding agency and the partner members after project proposals were approved. Working principles as to how the partnership would function were often verbally stated. When a successful pilot project was completed during these foundation building years, many of these same stakeholders strategically moved into the next phase of the continuum. As well, some partnerships did not progress beyond a pilot phase yet still considered their work to be successful. As awareness of the NLS program grew among business and labour organizations over the years, new groupings began the pre-partnership phase in the development and demonstration years and to some extent in the period of program change.

### ***The Second Phase – partnership***

The second phase on the continuum is “partnership.” Although this type of partnership has probably occurred over the three periods of time, it may be more typical during the developmental and demonstration years. An example of such a partnership type is the one formed between Bow Valley College and Skillplan, the BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council, to develop and launch TOWES. In these types of partnerships, more attention and time were allocated to achieve mutually-valued objectives. In some

instances, the early work in a pre-partnership or a pilot project allowed members to further access information about the national workplace literacy picture and to integrate new project objectives into changes occurring in each partner organization. Partners recognized that this was an opportunity to work together because it was convenient arrangement and the project goals aligned with the changes occurring in their own organizations. These projects were often more specified with longer term objectives. Each member of the partnership usually gave more resource time, and this increased capacity to meet the goals of the project.

“We have been guided in this work by many teachers, researchers and theorists around the world who have been talking for nearly two decades about a paradigm shift in thinking about the nature of literacy itself” (p. 4).

Belfiore, M.E., Defoe, T.A., Folinsbee, S., Hunter, J. and Jackson, N.S. (2004). *Reading Work: Literacies in the Workplace*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Together the partner organizations were able to do more. Mutual trust and respect moved beyond the individual partners and spread to other staff in the business, labour, and education organizations. Sometimes, activities and tasks around the shared objectives provided opportunities to participate in each other’s organizational functions, such as seminars and symposiums. Information flow among members was more coordinated and strategies to accomplish the project work became blended. The exchange of information increased and added to building capacity to work at a problem. There was also a search for other people and organizations who could use the project information. Specific roles of each partner and respective organization tended to be more focused on the implementation of the project results. Occasionally, agreements or partner contracts were written.

### ***The Third Phase – Partnership***

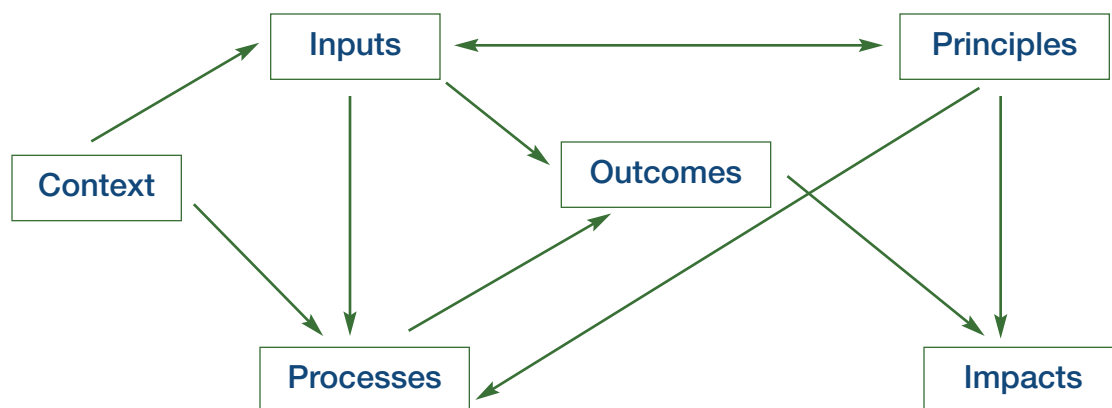
The third phase on the continuum is “Partnership.” An example of such a partnership type was the one formed between the Ontario Federation of Labour and the provincial government to operate BEST. The focus of interaction was more on developing and implementing the project together. The project activities grew directly out of a common set of interests and skills. There was more of a mission orientation and goals were more open-ended. Benefits of this type of partnership were increased status because of field recognition. Member organizations were able to become more than what they would be alone. The mutual trust and respect permeated through parts of each other’s organizations and there was sometimes

an invitation to sit on each other’s committees or boards or to provide advice on different types of organizational work. Strategies to complete and implement the work were developed together as well as marketing the product or project results. Partner organizations acknowledged each other’s expertise and ability to build capacity to address and solve the critical issue or problem at the workplace. Agreements tended to focus on a broader area of mutual interest and a commitment to work together.

## Partnership Working

There is also a growing body of literature that describes attempts to foster collaboration in the planning and delivery of public services and seeks to identify generic aspects of the process. One such approach has been documented by Asthana, Richardson and Halliday (2002) that looks at a framework which captures the key ingredients of partnership working. This framework will be used here as a reporting structure to illustrate some of the main themes that have emerged from this case study. The framework for examining partnership working is presented in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 – A FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING PARTNERSHIP WORKING



### *The Context of Partnership Working*

“Most likely to receive training – are urban businesses and those with a higher number of employees”

*Workplace Literacy:  
Who, What, Where,  
When, Why, How.  
Saskatchewan Labour  
Force Development  
Board.*

The geographical context played an important role in how and when partnerships were developed and sustained. Certain regions and localities across the country were more able to take advantage of the Business and Labour Partnership Program than others. Awareness of literacy issues in the workplace by business and labour happened at different times and regions of Canada. As well, when local communities had a long history of community development and a well-established network that had already been fostered by previous types of partnerships, this positively affected the readiness to become involved in the Business and Labour Partnership Program.

The political context also had a bearing on how and when partner members were able to co-ordinate action. During the foundation building and development and demonstration years, local energies were harnessed and innovation and risk taking were promoted. These early wins acted as a springboard for further development of different partnership arrangements among the stakeholders. As an emphasis on national and provincial priorities shifted throughout the duration of the program, so did the focus of the partnership working. More recently, the top-down political agenda on accountability was at odds with the building of sustainable partnerships from the bottom up. This change affected the trust of partner organizations.

### *Inputs to Partnership Working*

A key input was the recognition and acceptance of a need for partnership among members. Identifying real needs at the changing workplace was the motivation for partner organizations to come together. Exchanging relevant information about the workplace changes from different stakeholder viewpoints helped to develop alliances and raised awareness. This input provided a catalyst for real commitment on the ground.

Another input was the provision of resources. This tangible support was provided by the Business and Labour Partnership Program in terms of partnership project funding, a staff dedicated to the process of partnership building and, later, more formal committee structures

intended to reflect a political imperative of accountability. During the foundation building and development and demonstration years, there was strategic support for local partnerships and this helped to build the reputation of the Business and Labour Partnership Program. Other resources in their own right were the knowledge and skills that accumulated as partnerships began to work.

Active leadership was also a critical input in determining the extent and pace of partnership development. Leadership occurred both at the NLS level and at the partner organization level. Individual personalities were a dimension of this good leadership. Related to this was the autonomy around decision making which happened as partnerships continued to spread. Establishing linkages with other organizations and deepening an understanding of the issues connected to workplace literacy were also viewed as leadership strategies.

### *Processes of Partnership Working*

“They enabled us to support and work as a catalyst in education programs.”

BUSINESS AND EDUCATION  
EXPERT

Knowledge and information sharing were of central importance to the building of partnerships. This was horizontal across all partners in the form of dialogue and consultation. Networking both formally and informally strengthened the partnerships. “Big” decisions, such as the allocation of funds were made inside the partnership meetings.

Differences of opinions were valued in the decision-making process with very little conflict and more of a consensus-building approach. In most cases, partnership cultures developed that were different than their individual organizational cultures. Individual project accountability for decisions and activities were entrusted to all partners. As well, reporting requirements to the funder were clear during the foundation building and development and demonstration years. In the period of program change, demonstrating accountability became more complex and this variation confused partners.

### *Partnership Principle*

The inclusion principle was a cornerstone for fostering partnerships. This principle allowed equal representation from the relevant

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stakeholder groups, resulting in partnerships that were more manageable in decision making and project management. As the tier system came into place, however, during the period of program change, principles of access and representation were called into question. Small community groups and representatives with local needs were distanced as priorities shifted to the call for large-scale projects from national organizations and consortia.

### ***Outcomes***

One key outcome has been the sharing of principles, knowledge and understanding about workplace literacy and essential skills training. Partners agreed that each member organization learned about the aims and philosophies of the other member organizations and now better appreciate their organizational ethos. Another outcome was the cumulative dialogue with partners around workplace change and literacy and how this moved into a wider training agenda. In addition, partners established criteria that focused on how the project work was progressing and what was proving difficult. This was empowering to the partnership members. Being able to take action in an autonomous way and to build on successes helped to further the development of the Business and Labour Partnership Program.

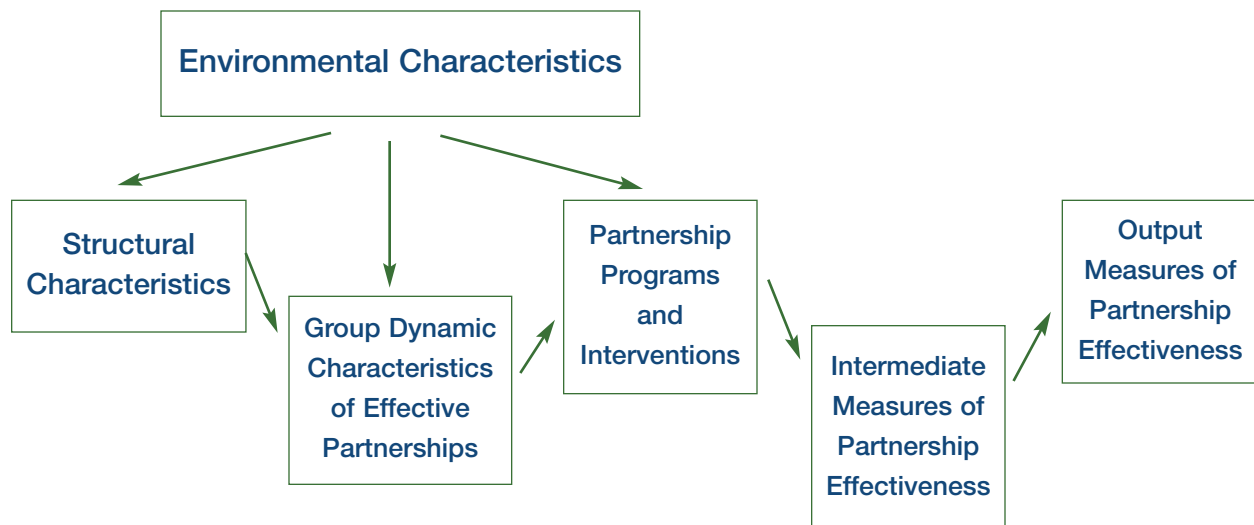
### ***Impacts***

As mentioned in the previous section, five groups were impacted by the work of the program: business organizations and employers; labour organizations and their local constituents; educational practitioners and experts; and program participants and the community at large. One of the impacts of the program was that there was greater synergy among stakeholder organizations. There was also more choice for organizations in terms of how to take action when the issue of literacy at work surfaced. Innovative tools, procedures and learning materials were all products from different partnerships. As well, there was a sense of co-ordination in the field that effected the development of literacy as a profession in itself.

### Group Dynamics within Partnerships

A third approach to understanding partnership development is to look at the key dimensions of the group dynamics within the partnership process. Schulz, Israel and Lantz (2003) have developed an instrument for evaluating the dimensions of group dynamics within community-based participatory research partnerships. Although the use and application of this evaluation instrument is beyond the scope of the project, the guiding framework for the development of the tool will be used to shed some light on our findings. Figure 3 shows the characteristics of effective groups within the context of assessing coalitions and partnerships.

FIGURE 3 – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING GROUP DYNAMICS AS AN ASPECT OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS



This figure is based on the idea that partnership objectives depend on the effectiveness of the group in using its individual and collective resources to reach its goals and to satisfy the needs of group members.

### *Environmental and Structural Characteristics*

The group dynamics of these individual partnerships were shaped by both environmental and structural characteristics. At the environmental level, partnership effectiveness was enhanced when individual partner organizations came together with a common response to a local or regional workplace literacy problem. The more diversity in viewpoints from partner organizations as well as any previous past experiences in collaboration set a tone for the group dynamics.

“The dynamics were healthy, it was an open relationship, lots of open dialogue...”

BUSINESS EXPERT

Structural level characteristics such as the formalization of the partnership also shaped the dynamics. Many of the partnerships discussed in this case study established different types of agreements among members which ranged from the informal to the more formal type of contracts. What seems to have influenced the partnerships even more so was the common set of working principles that guided the project work. Finding the right mix of partners was also a key structural characteristic.

### *Group Dynamic Characteristics of Effective Partnerships*

At the centre of the group dynamics of the partnership process was a shared leadership from all members which included equal workload tasks throughout the duration of the project work. When communication among all partners was open and there was a flow of information between the funding organization and the member organizations effectiveness was enhanced.

Another characteristic of the group dynamics was the co-operative development of project goals which aligned with a shared vision of what was possible. This helped set the stage for flexible participatory decision making processes. Consensus for important decisions, such as allocation of project funds, was often used. This type of dynamic allowed for a recognition of conflicts and various types of constructive problem solving.

Using a problem-solving process, established during the initial stage of the partnership, aided the sharing of power among mem-

bers. All of these dynamics resulted in the development of mutual trust—a key to effective partnership development. At the project operational level, meetings were well organized, with agendas that were developed in collaboration and shared facilitation. Partner members also shared in the tasks related to project evaluation.

### ***Partnership Programs and Interventions***

“They’ve been  
the cushion on the  
politics.”

BUSINESS EXPERT

As indicated in Figure 3 both the environmental characteristics and the group dynamics characteristics influenced the types of projects and interventions that were actually created. As presented in the findings section, projects were very innovative and cutting edge during the foundation building and development and demonstration years and less so during the period of program change.

### ***Intermediate Measures of Partnership Effectiveness***

For the most part, partner organizations perceived themselves as belonging to an effective group who achieved their goals in moving a workplace literacy and essential skills agenda forward. Partners also perceived personal, organizational and community benefits from participating in the partnership process. This perception was more evident in the foundation building and development and demonstration years. As well, there was a high degree of involvement in the project activities from all partner members. This contributed to a shared ownership and a commitment to implementing the project results. This cohesiveness was identifiable and added to members’ perceptions of effectiveness. In some instances, there was a sense of group and community empowerment when project goals were met. This led to future expectations that if another partnership could be developed, it would also have a similar positive impact.

### ***Output Measures of Partnership Effectiveness***

As presented in the findings, there were many accomplishments of Business and Labour Partnership Program. Achievements ranged

from the creation of new workplace models for business and labour groups to the recognition of literacy at the workplace as a national training priority. Partnership effectiveness was also felt when strides were made to develop provincial strategies and initiatives where none had existed earlier.

## **Through the Lens of Program Planning Models in Adult Education**

Another way of making sense of the findings and applying them to one's own situation, is to view the NLS Business and Labour Partnership Program through the lens of programming models in adult education. Program planning models consist of ideas about how programs should be organized and what elements are necessary to ensure successful outcomes. Over the past few years many approaches to planning programs for adults have developed. Some models are linear and stepwise while others are non sequential using in-depth qualitative descriptions to depict a comprehensive array of issues and decision points. Three program planning models will be used here to understand different parts of the data. Boone's Conceptual Programming Model (2002) helps to explain some of the workings of the Business and Labour Partnership Program from a macro level analysis. Caffarella's Interactive Model of Program Planning (2002) helps us to see how certain steps were taken by stakeholders to actually form the partnership and a plan for a project. At the micro level, Cervero and Wilson's Negotiation Model of Program Planning (1998) provides some insights into the roles and behaviours of partner members.

## **A Conceptual Programming Model**

Boone's conceptual programming model is designed to bring about planned intended changes of targeted systems based on the diagnosis of situational contexts. The model includes three interconnected and related sub-processes (1) planning (2) design and implementation and (3) evaluation and accountability. Each of

the sub-processes contains specific tasks that are approached from a process orientation rather than a mechanistic perspective as seen in Figure 4.

**FIGURE 4 – BOONE’S CONCEPTUAL PROGRAMMING MODEL (ABRIDGED VERSION)**

Planning	Design and Implementation		Evaluation and Accountability	
The Organization and its Renewal Process	Linking the Organization to its Publics	Designing the Planned Program	Implementing the Planned Program	Determining Program Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• functions of the organization</li> <li>• processes in the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mapping of the publics</li> <li>• analysis of target publics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• translating marco needs into objectives</li> <li>• specifying learning strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing plans of action</li> <li>• monitoring the learning transaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• measuring outputs</li> <li>• using findings for organizational renewal</li> </ul>

***Planning***

The planning sub-process includes two distinct but closely related dimensions: the organization and its renewal process and linking the organization to its publics. In this case, the organization is the National Literacy Secretariat. As described in the historical chronology, the NLS began its mandate in the late 80s to facilitate and effect changes in Canadian adult literacy. Its mission, philosophy and goals drove the planning process for the new Business and Labour Partnership Program. During its inception and the early foundation building years, the program was conceptually driven by a community and social development approach to change. This was accomplished through linkages with the target publics (business, labour, education), leader involvement, collaboration, needs

identification and analysis. The feedback obtained from the stakeholders and the lessons learned during these early years helped to further shape the program and facilitate a type of renewal process into the next period of development and demonstration.

A key process undertaken during these formation years of the program was the task of achieving effective linkages with each of its target publics and the various stakeholder groups. This was done by scanning and interpreting the external environment. Pilot projects provided knowledge about the social, cultural and political forces operating within this workplace environment. It also involved engaging the leaders of those publics in needs identification. These program planning steps around needs were undertaken during the foundation building years and helped to focus the next phase of the Program.

“There is no one right way to conduct an ONA (organizational needs assessment).”

Folinsbee, S., DeWitt, K., Rideout, E., Jensen, J. and Nutter, P. *A Guide for Planning and Conducting an Organizational Needs Assessment for Municipal Workplace Literacy programs.* Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators.

### ***Design and Implementation***

The second sub-process in Boone’s model is the design and implementation of the program. During the foundation building years, a blueprint for responding to the analyzed needs of the target publics emerged. Of particular interest during the design phase were the beliefs and strategies used to develop and further extend the program. Based on early successes, stakeholders from each target public helped to market the program impacts. This design and implementation sub-process has extended throughout the life of the program but was dependent on the amount of government funding at different periods of time.

### ***Evaluation and Accountability***

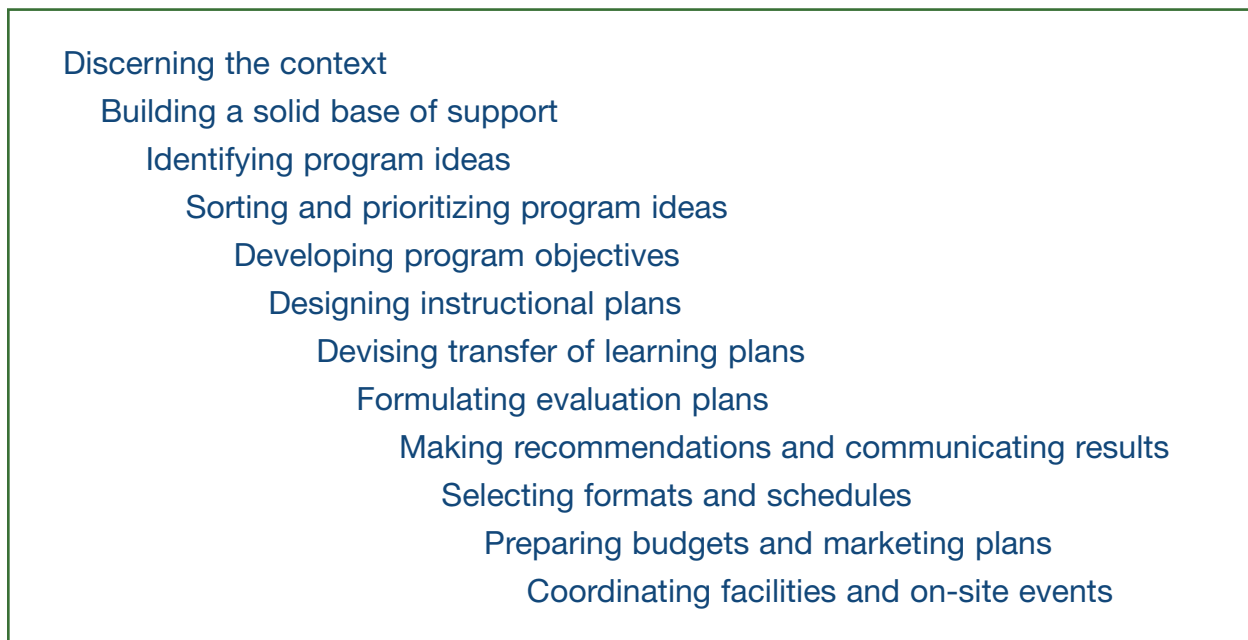
Two connecting dimensions of the third sub-process are evaluation and accountability. These emphasize the importance of obtaining hard evidence to verify the achievements in the program to significant stakeholders. In this case, those significant stakeholders were the federal government and Parliament. Regular mandated external evaluations helped to determine the effectiveness of the Business and Labour Partnership Program, and the costs incurred in producing the outcomes. As a result of the evaluations, the goals

and mechanisms of the program shifted in the development and demonstration years and even more so in the period of program change. During this period, an increased emphasis was placed on accountability. As defined in the program planning model, accountability refers to the process whereby the organization is held accountable for planned program outcomes and the effectiveness of their efforts in producing the intended outcomes. As a result of the focus on government accountability, there was much disconnect between the target publics and the NLS as an organization.

## An Interactive Model of Program Planning

Caffarella's interactive model of program planning provides some insights into the important steps needed to plan and implement a workplace literacy project. It also helps to focus on steps needed in early partnership formation. In this interpretation, the term project is used interchangeably with the term program. Caffarella presents a guide for practice through her stepwise model as seen in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5 – INTERACTIVE MODEL OF PROGRAM PLANNING



It takes into account the ever-changing nature of the planning process. It also acknowledges that people plan programs and that planning is not a neutral set of events.

“Often, people are working so hard to set up a program, keep it running, or achieve their learning goals, that they forget to celebrate their successes” (p. 31).

Evans, S., Twiss, D. and Wedel, R. *British Columbia Pulp and Paper Industry’s Experience in Implementing a Worker Focused Learning Program in the Workplace: The LEAP Experience (Learning and Education Assisted by Peers)*. British Columbia Federation of Labour.

For the most part, the accomplishments and impacts of the NLS Business and Labour Partnership Program all started with individual organizations experiencing workplace change. At its earliest inception point, two or more stakeholders came together to discern the context. What happened at this step is that a representative from one organization became knowledgeable about another organization. Structural and cultural factors about each other’s workplace were exchanged. For example, each stakeholder became aware of the mission of another organization, their information systems, how staff was trained and organizational decision making patterns.

On another level cultural factors were exchanged such as history and traditions, and the organizational beliefs and values. This flow of information was necessary before the partnership could begin. From their own perspectives, partners also became knowledgeable about the wider environment and its impact on the workplace and change. For example, important discussions took place around the current economic conditions, the national and provincial political agendas, and questions about whose needs would be served through a partnership. Sources of information were exchanged and a common set of beliefs about what needed to be done started to take place.

The next step focused on building a solid base of support. This support took the form of both commitment and action. Commitment to the idea of working together most often happened at this step. Action took place when people at different levels of each organization responded to that commitment. Small networks began to form and provided input into early project ideas. Further support for these ideas was often obtained from the wider community. Collaborations with other organizations and groups sometimes occurred.

Ethical issues such as privacy and confidentiality were considered by the organization representatives and how these issues might

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impact a project idea. At this point, the ideas were sorted and prioritized and there was equal decision sharing among the individual organizations. This was often the beginning of a partnership around a workplace literacy project. The next step was the development of project objectives which were written so that they could be understood by all partners involved. They were measurable in some form, and when changes were needed, negotiation was used in the planning process.

During the implementation stage of the project, action plans that had stemmed from the objectives were carried out and focused on the intended audience. Many of the other steps in Caffarella's model were often used over the life of the project. For example, project evaluation approaches that had been determined earlier were implemented and different formats were used to communicate project results or recommendations.

### **Negotiation Model of Program Planning**

Cervero and Wilson (1998) believe that program planning in adult education is a social activity where people construct programs by negotiating interests in contexts marked by socially structured power relations. In their work, power is not viewed as a static resource in position but rather as a dynamic process in which agents and social structures interact. They also suggest that planners are operating on two levels as negotiators in the planning process. Substantial negotiations are around important features of the program while meta-negotiations are about the political relationships of who is included and excluded. There are three dimensions to their work: planning actions, power relations and relationship interests. When confronted with issues of power, planners use different behavioural patterns associated with negotiating organizational political processes. As the authors suggest, there are a number of ways that power is used to influence what happens in the planning process.

Drawing from the data there are both positive and negative influences of power as partnerships among the stakeholders

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developed. During the foundation building and development and demonstration years, power was used as a positive influence in shaping the felt needs of the partner organizations. Attention was given to ensure that all voices that needed to be heard were included in the initial formation of the partnership. Related to this was the importance of bringing alternative and divergent opinions to the planning table and having equal input into setting the agendas. Power was used as a positive influence in determining which local needs and which local populations were going to be served through the workplace project. Another example of positive influence was the manner in which partners set the norms for decisions that ensured a democratic process.

The period of program change saw a number of instances where the use of power had a negative influence on partnership development. For example, differences of opinion between the partners and the funder around project directions were suppressed or not heard. A political agenda which was at odds with stakeholder interests and a government ethos of accountability were also seen as negative influences of power on the development and sustainability of partnerships. Pressure was also felt by partner organizations to accept a new way of accessing NLS Business and Labour Partnership Program funds. These were often viewed as out of step with the needs of the partners.

On another dimension, individual member negotiation skills were evident in most of the partnerships that were developed. On a meta-negotiation level, considerable time was spent by all partners creating a planning committee to represent various stakeholder interests. Coupled with this was the negotiation that took place to develop an overall purpose and goals statement or mission for the joint project which reflected each partner organization. At the substantive negotiation level, partners negotiated around project action plans, budgets, and promotional strategies for the final deliverables.