

Success By Design: What Works in Workforce Development

By Michael Bloom and Alison Campbell Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada, 2002
Review by Connie Nelson, Director, Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable

What makes joint labor-management programs successful? Researchers Michael Bloom and Alison Campbell explore this question as the basis for their comprehensive research study, *Success by Design: What Works in Workforce Development*. This highly useful report identifies and showcases a core of design elements that contribute to effective workplace programs, particularly collaborations between management and unions. Though published in 2002, the report remains relevant today by providing a useful set of principles and a variety of pragmatic tools to start up or improve workplace education partnerships.

Who Commissioned the Study?

Training by Design was commissioned by the Conference Board of Canada, a not-for profit applied research organization, in conjunction with the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and the Association of Joint Labor-Management Education Programs. The three organizations represent a range of views—employers, trainers, and unions, and as such avoid an excessively narrow research agenda.

How Did They Arrive At Their Principles?

The researchers arrive at a set of principles after investigating joint labor-management programs that have demonstrated success. The core elements they present underlie a variety of program types, subject matter, funding sources, and life spans.

To collect their data, the researchers focus on nine joint labor-management worker education programs. They identify 60 respondents with whom they conduct in-depth interviews. From this data, they identify key success indicators and create profiles of successful programs. The cohorts include:

* The Alliance for Employee Growth and Development, a partnership of Communications industry employers, the Communication Workers of America(CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW);

* The Culinary Training Institute, a partnership of Las Vegas hotels and casinos and UNITE HERE;

* The 1199SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund, a partnership of 1199SIEU New York and the New York League of Hospitals and Nursing Homes.

Key Indicators of Success

The report identified the following 12 key indicators of successful programs:

1. Continuous process of collaborative planning
2. Learning Needs Analysis
3. Career/Educational Planning Services Available
4. Access to Continuing Education Opportunities
5. Access to Financial Assistance for Education and Training

6. Program Marketing and Promotion

7. Measuring and Evaluating Program Effectiveness

8. Dual Training Focus: Meeting worker and workplace needs

9. Voluntary participation of workers whenever possible

10. Worker Involvement in Designing, Implementing and Evaluating Training

11 .Multiple Learning strategies for Worker Students

12. Specific criteria for selecting and evaluating educational and training providers

The report details the experience of profiled programs with each key indicator, using concrete examples of how that indicator contributed to the success of the program and why it was important. They also offer examples of how practice regarding that indicator could be improved. For example, all the profiled programs offered access to continuing education, an important indicator of success. However, 70% of worker-students in these programs “incorrectly thought that additional training, related to the course they were currently enrolled in (or had just completed) was not available to them.”

(p.18)

The researchers also found, when investigating indicator 7(measuring and evaluating program effectiveness) that there were wide variations in the methods used to evaluate effectiveness. Evidence showed a greater reliance on “soft” measures (e.g. opinions of worker-students, union representatives and managers) than on “harder”

measures such as increased sales or reduced waste. The authors make a case for using both types of measures in program evaluation once they are identified as valuable and used consistently.

Valuable Tools for New and Ongoing Programs

In addition to the research findings, the report contains valuable tools for both new and ongoing programs. For example, a chapter on the program development process uses the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) process and shows how the profiled programs have used this process in start-up. This pragmatic tool could be particularly useful to new programs. It compresses important program management elements into a manageable system, helping to streamline the often complex and fragmented elements of partnership programs. The chapter also shows how the various indicators of success play into the PDCA process and how the cycle is repeated again and again as the program grows and improves. An especially useful chart lays out how each indicator comes into play in each phase of the PDCA cycle.

For example, Indicator 2 deals with learning needs analyses. If one applies the PDCA cycle, it might look like the following:

- * Stage 1 (Plan), collaborate on skills upgrading.

- * Stage 2 (Do), focus on individual needs assessments in conjunction with career counseling.

- * Stage 3 (Check), review training content to maximize relevancy.

* Stage 4 (Act), revise needs analysis process to find the best fit between skills development and training.

Not every indicator will be relevant for every stage in every program, but the chart is a worthwhile checklist for program planners and operators to be sure they are considering and prioritizing the indicators at every step.

How Is This Report Relevant to Massachusetts?

Workplace education programs in Massachusetts represent a variety of program designs. Some operate as stable Joint Labor-Management models, such as SEIU 615 Voice and Future Fund, BEST Corp. (Hotel Workers Training Fund), 1199SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund, and the UMassAmherst Trust Fund. These programs have negotiated with employers to create stable learning opportunities for members. Others represent new on-site learning programs, and an increasing number are creating partnerships among employer, union, and education provider to apply for the state's new Learn at Work funding to create ABE and ESOL classes for workers.

Both fledgling and experienced workplace programs face similar challenges at various stages in their implementation. One of them is documenting their effectiveness and presenting persuasive arguments to employers and other sources for continued, stable funding. Success by Design addresses many of these issues; it provides compelling arguments for the value of joint labor-management workplace programs and offers tools to help programs meet positive outcomes, thus increasing their chances for buy-in and program stabilization.

Much of the 25 years' experience of a nationwide program like the Alliance, offering a broad range of skills training, will not apply to some of our fledgling programs. But this report summarized issues that many of our programs do face, and hopefully will face as they gain stability and maturity. Most programs will be able to use some of the key indicators in their own PDCA: planning, doing, checking and acting/reviewing. It's good to know we are part of a bigger picture, and this is a useful review to help programs at any stage in the life cycle.

Download the complete report

http://www.workplacebasicskills.com/frame/pdfs/Success_by_Design.pdf