A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE POST-EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATES OF AN EXECUTIVE PROGRAM FOR LABOR LEADERS

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Abstract

Labor leaders need specific knowledge and skills to successfully lead their organizations. The Northeast Labor Executive Program (NLEP) provides labor leaders the necessary curriculum and pedagogy to gain that content, knowledge and skills; however, if this content and skills are not transferred into the workplace, then labor leaders will not be able to successfully lead their organizations. If we were able to understand how labor leaders experience the transfer of learning from the NLEP into their organizations, then we might be better able to inform the programming provided by the executive program. Therefore, the purpose of this general qualitative study was to gain insight into the post-educational experiences of graduates of a six-week executive program for labor leaders. Guided by Schlenker’s (1997) theory of personal responsibility, this study sought to answer the following research question: How do graduates of an executive program for labor leaders make sense of their post-educational experience as it relates to the transfer of learning from the program to the workplace? Findings show that participants had specific goals for their unions and the program with volition and intent to transfer the learning to their specific unions and the labor movement. Participants exercised personal responsibility to transfer the newly acquired learning not only because of their leadership roles and their organization’s investment in them, but also because of their values and commitment to the movement. While most participants were satisfied with the program offerings, they also encountered barriers to transfer. Participants recommended that establishing a mentoring program could help with learning transfer. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Learning transfer, Personal responsibility theory, Union leadership, Executive program, Labor education
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*The only limits in life are the ones you make – Author Unknown*

*When life knocks you down, roll over and look at the stars – Author Unknown*

*Wake up with determination and go to bed with a sense of satisfaction – Author Unknown*

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Chapter I: Introduction

For more than 75 years, the Northeast Labor Executive Program (NLEP), an executive program for labor leaders, has sought to provide labor leaders with skills needed to deal with changes and challenges that they may encounter as they continue in their journey of advocating for working people. However, as union membership density in the United States has declined from over 30 percent of all workers in the 1950s to 20.1% in 1983, and 11.1% in 2014 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), questions remain. Are the skills being transferred to the workplace? How can the NLEP help in the process? These are some of the questions that this study addressed.

Research Problem

To remain competitive in this globalized economy, organizations, including labor unions, are focusing more and more on developing their human capital with a focus on learning (Arguinis & Kraiger, 2009). As a result, billions of dollars are spent on both in-house training and on outside educational opportunities (Paradise & Homer, 2007) to help employees acquire skills for job performance, leadership development, and personal growth (Arguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Because of the important role that managers and leaders play in the operation of organizations, a great portion of the training resources are used in leadership development (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; Riggio, 2008). With such an investment in human capital, organizations, including labor unions, have expectations that training will reap benefits.

Unless individuals transfer the skills from the training sites to the workforce (Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Gilpin-Jackson & Bushe, 2007), the likelihood of organizations or workers benefiting from the learning investment is minimal or even nonexistent (Hatala & Fleming, 2007). Saks (2002), in his survey of trained professionals, found that 40% of trainees do not use
the newly acquired learning immediately after the training, 70% fade away after a year, and only 50% of total training benefits the individual or the organization. Many studies show that transfer of learning is facilitated when trainees are motivated to learn (Baldwin, Ford & Blume, 2009; Blume, Ford, Baldwin & Huang, 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008; Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Tziner, Fisher, Senior & Weisberg, 2007). In this context, motivation is viewed as the determination or persistence of trainee in accomplishing set goals (Robbins & Judge, 2009).

Labor leaders need specific knowledge and skills to successfully lead their organizations. The Northeast Labor Executive Program (NLEP) provides labor leaders the necessary curriculum and pedagogy to gain that content knowledge and skills; however, if the acquired content and skills are not transferred into the workplace, then labor leaders will not be able to successfully lead their organizations. If we were able to understand how labor leaders experience the transfer of learning from the executive labor program into their organizations, then, we might be better able to support informed programming within the NLEP to help foster this. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain insight into the post-educational experience of graduates of a six-week executive program for labor leaders. More specifically, the study focuses on the graduates’ sense of responsibility in applying the newly acquired skills/knowledge to their specific union.

**Justification of Research Problem**

One of the purposes of labor unions is to advocate for the well-being of the workers. This entails negotiating for better wages and working conditions through the process of collective bargaining (Fossom, 2006). Labor leaders are the voice of the worker in the workplace and work on behalf of the worker to handle grievances, problem solve, mediate, and
arbitrate. With the involvement of the government to regulate labor relations between labor unions and employers, advocating for workers also involves setting up contracts and lobbying with congress for legislation beneficial to workers. To keep the movement growing, organizing and communicating with the media are also an essential.

Having to transition from representing members to leading and managing staff can also be quite challenging (Margolis, 2011). Labor leaders are responsible for the effective management of their unions. This entails setting up goals, planning for the future of the organization, as well as the recruitment and development of new leaders (Dunlop, 1990; Weil, 1994). Labor leaders are also expected to be knowledgeable about technological, economic, and legislative changes (Nesbitt, 2002) and to be proficient at representing and promoting union policies and values (Eaton, 1992). Labor leaders are also required to provide “integrative and inspirational leadership” and “build solidarity towards common goals” (Gray, 1975, pp. 472-473).

The knowledge and skills needed to meet these expectations are usually acquired through formal education and training. This can be problematic in union organizations, which typically have no “established and recognized sequence of professional training” (Gray, 1975, p. 472) and, in addition, have strong political and democratic tradition of promoting from the rank-and-file (Bok & Dunlop, 1970; Dunlop, 1990).

Studies have found that most labor leaders acquired their skills through a “sink or swim approach” (Eaton, 1995, as cited in Nesbit, 2002, p. 51) or learning from experience or from mistakes (Eaton, 1992). Because labor leaders often have lower levels of education, and limited administrative and leadership skills, and because of union political and democratic characteristics (Bok & Dunlop, 1970), leadership education requires a different approach. This approach must
relate to and change with the goals of the labor movement (Gray, 1966), and be rooted in union values.

For many years, the NLEP has been providing labor leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with these changes and challenges (Bok & Dunlop, 1970; Dunlop, 1990; Nesbit, 2002; Preparing Leadership for the Challenges of the Future, 2015, 2016). Thus, it is appropriate to examine the extent to which the skills and knowledge acquired through the NLEP are being used in the union workplace, and the extent to which labor leaders who have participated in the NLEP see themselves as accountable for the effective use of newly acquired skills in their respective workplaces.

Relating Discussion to Audience

The study considered how the psychological mechanisms of accountability are used by graduates of an executive program for labor leaders in achieving their goals of applying what they learn in the program to their specific union and the labor movement. Since the commencement of the program, one of the criteria for admission has been participant’s involvement and interest in the labor movement. This criterion is accomplished by making sure that the NLEP only accepts participants who are sponsored by longstanding unions, which they can promote after participation in the program (Adams, 1994; Trumpbour, 2012). After seventy-five years of existence, this criterion is still in place. Another criterion for admission is that participants set specific goals for the betterment of their union and/or the labor movement. Investigating how graduates transfer what they have learned into practice will not only help to improve the program but also will assist labor leaders in facing and meeting the challenges of the organizations they serve.
Significance of Research Problem

As outlined in the NLEP Brochure (2015, 2016), labor leaders are faced with constant change and challenges that require new approaches in leading and advocating for working people. Across the United States, labor is threatened and union membership density has decreased from over 30 percent in the 1950s to 20.1% in 1983, 11.3% in 2013 and 11.1% in 2014 (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Moreover, “Dramatic changes in the world economy, the legal landscape and the nature, size and composition of the workplace demand new approaches to organizing, bargaining, coalition building and union administration” (Preparing Leadership for the Challenges of the Future, 2015, 2016).

For more than 75 years, the NLEP has been preparing leaders and emerging leaders to deal with these challenges. Through a specialized curriculum of case studies that addresses current issues that labor leaders and labor activists face in their day to day activities, the NLEP offers participants the opportunity to “develop keener analytical, managerial, and problem solving skills” and “to discover ways to deepen public understanding of the value and importance of labor unions” (Preparing Leadership for the Challenges of the Future, 2015, 2016).

While the NLEP has demonstrated its ability to support the growth of labor leaders from all over the world, there is not enough evidence to substantiate this claim, especially as it relates to the transfer of learning from the course to the workplace. Moreover, although the substantial increase in the past few years in the number of unions and participants enrolling in the executive program could indicate confidence in the effectiveness of the program, the decrease of union membership density remains a profound crisis for the labor movement. One way to tackle this
issue, besides teaching the right content, is to make sure that the work that has been done in the classroom finds its way to the workplace and in labor organizing.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Although the NLEP has been evaluated on the basis of questions to participants about their satisfaction with the courses, there has been no follow-up procedure or method of accountability to make sure that participants achieve or follow through in using what they have learned to achieve their goals for their union and/or the labor movement. Burke and Saks (2009) suggest that a gap still remains for more theory-based research focusing on psychological mechanisms of accountability. There is also a need to understand training transfer through qualitative studies which allow participants to give their perspectives on what it means to be accountable, and how such accountability can help them achieve their goals (Burke & Sacks, 2009). In trying to understand participants’ views on the transfer of learning, identifying enhancers and barriers that prevent them from accomplishing their goals is also needed (Burke & Sacks, 2009).

Thus, using Schlenker’s (1997) personal responsibility theory, this study builds upon Burke and Sacks’ (2009) work which has sought to discover the impact of accountability in transfer of learning through the same model of accountability. The majority of current work focuses on hard skills training, and “very little research exists on transfer of leadership training at a time when leadership is an area of increasing importance to organizations” (Gilpin-Jackson & Bushe, 2007, p. 1000). This study considers how learning provided in an executive/academic program for participants belonging to diverse union organizations nationally, and internationally, and at different levels in their unions, can be transferred to the workplace.
Moreover, current literature discusses how trainees’ motivation (Caffarella, 2002; Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Wlodkowski, 2008) and accountability (Burke & Sacks, 2009; Sacks & Belcourt, 2006; Taylor, Russ-Eft & Chan, 2005) facilitate the transfer of learning. Assessing whether this information is consistent in this study may contribute to the support or refute of theory. Finally, with the call for more theory-based research on transfer of learning (Burke & Sacks, 2009), this study will help fill a gap in the literature.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the post-educational experience of the graduates of a six-week executive program for labor leaders. The study addressed the following question: How do graduates of an executive program for labor leaders make sense of their post-educational experience as it relates to the transfer of learning from the program to the workplace?

Theoretical Framework

To explore the post-educational experience of the graduates of the executive program for labor leaders as it relates to the transfer of learning, this study used Schlenker’s personal responsibility theory (1997). A description of the theory is given followed by how it can be used to make sense of participants’ experiences with learning transfer. This section concludes with a discussion on how the concept of responsibility/accountability aligns with the problem of practice.

Schlenker’s Personal Responsibility Theory

This study is framed using the Schlenker’s (1997) theory of personal responsibility, which provides a framework to analyze and understand people’s responsibility in organizational settings and society. Described as the backbone of interpersonal and societal relations, the
concept of responsibility is used to make sure that people “live up to their obligations and work to accomplish what they are supposed to accomplish” (Schlenker, 1997, p. 242). According to Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy & Doherty (1994), responsibility is a concept used to evaluate people’s behavior and to hold them accountable. The term is used interchangeably with accountability and has been used since antiquity by Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, in their “analysis of justice and duty” (Schlenker et al., 1994, p. 632). The term is also used in the English, French, and German languages, “referring to ideas of being trustworthy or capable of fulfilling obligations” (McKeon, 1957, as cited in Schlenker et al., 1994, p. 632).

In 1994, in their study of responsibility as a concept to evaluate people’s behavior and the extent to which people can be held accountable for their behavior, Schlenker and his colleagues introduced the triangle model of responsibility. The model presents an integrated framework of three elements, prescriptions/expectations, event/action, and identity/role, which must be clearly acknowledged by all stakeholders in order for an individual to be held accountable (Schlenker et al., 1994). Besides having a clear understanding of the three elements, responsibility depends on the strength of the three linkages, namely: prescriptions/expectations-event/action link, prescriptions/expectations-identity/role link, and identity/role-event/action link (Schlenker et al., 1994). Below is a graphical depiction of the theoretical framework.
Figure 1. The Pyramid of Accountability

SOURCE: Adapted from Schlenker et al., 1994, as figured in Burke & Sacks, 2009, p. 388.

Drawn from Schlenker’s et al. (1994) triangle model of responsibility, the premise of personal responsibility theory is that “an individual’s activities can be examined; evaluated and positively or negatively sanctioned by those to whom she or he is accountable” (Schlenker, 1997, p. 243). “Being accountable or answerable to someone involves social psychological processes” (Schlenker, 1997, p. 243), and the pyramid presents the framework in which individuals can be judged to be responsible by self or others based on the strength of the connection among the three elements (Schlenker et al., 1994).

Moreover, “responsibility as a consequence of strong psychological associations between the triangle elements, engages the self-system” (Schlenker, 1997, p. 244), and as such “will affect the actor’s determination to achieve prescribed goals” (Schlenker et al., 1994, p. 638). Determination is viewed as the effort put forth by the individual to accomplish the goals despite
obstacles he or she may encounter (Schlenker et al., 1994). Consequently, a strong linkage of all three elements will have implications for the individual’s behavior and may determine what should be done in the situation (expectations-action link), how obligated he or she will be (expectations-role link), and how much control (role-action link) he or she has over the event that might occur (Schlenker, 1997; Schlenker et al., 1994).

This study explores the experiences of labor leaders with the transfer of learning from the labor leadership program and uses the framework of personal responsibility to make sense of those experiences. Therefore, personal responsibility is an important and meaningful construct as it provides a useful framework to explore participants’ accomplishments and mechanisms used in the process. The framework is appropriate to this study because “it evokes image of duty, commitment, persistence, self-control, and the pursuit of commendable ideals” (Schlenker, 1997, p. 242), which are usually needed to accomplish goals.

**Positionality Statement**

We have all been at training programs in which we wished that what we have just learned could be directly transferred to the workplace. I have attended many of these trainings; however, I have also been very fortunate to have been on the other side of the spectrum as a longtime adult student at Northeastern University for my undergraduate studies, my Master’s program in education, and more recently this doctorate program. I had the opportunity to not only choose courses that are relevant to my work, but also to learn under faculty who cared enough to give students the opportunity to reflect on learning experiences that relate to their work.

To illustrate, in one of the master’s program courses, I was asked to reflect on my undergraduate experience and to elaborate on how my chosen major relates to my current position. Although that was a challenge considering that I was working in academia while
holding a degree in Health Management, having the opportunity to reflect on and to establish the connection between the two made me understand the importance of transfer of learning from one field to another and from the learning site to the workplace. In another course in the same program, I had the opportunity to reflect on my leadership capabilities and to elaborate on the use of these skills in the workplace. In another course, I even received a follow-up evaluation from an instructor inquiring about the transfer of learning to the workplace. These course evaluations forced me to self-assess and made me realize that it was important to continue incorporating what I learned in class into my everyday life.

The chosen theory relates so much to my life and educational path that there could be concerns for bias. For as long as I can remember, I have always aspired to be the best I could be. This behavior led me to this final phase of my educational journey. The expectations were to acquire advanced credentials, and somehow I feel that the path to follow was clear to me. This entailed successfully completing all the coursework and writing this dissertation. Although it has been a long journey, I feel that the expectations-action linkage was quite strong. I have a goal to acquire my doctorate and use the acquired knowledge in my work and my life.

In regard to the second linkage of the theory, which connects expectations to role/identity and focuses on the obligation one has based on her/his role or identity; I also feel that the linkage is quite strong. After spending more than seven years of my life in this program, as a role model, I feel that I have an obligation to myself and to my two adult children, no matter the obstacles encountered. Moreover, although there is no process of accountability in place in my organization, considering the amount of this investment toward my development through tuition reimbursement and for allowing me to focus my thesis on the executive program, I also feel that I have an obligation to the organization to use this newly acquired knowledge.
Regarding the last linkage, role-action link, which relates to the amount of control one has on the event that happened or should happen, although I had control over my studies as a student in the program, I feel that I did not have control most of the time as life happened in the last four years of this journey. At the end of the program, I had to change my field of study from Higher Education Administration to Organizational Leadership and Communication, a change that required a switch in focus on both my studies and on this final project. I also had to relocate both at home and at work in the past few years, and, more recently, the organization acquired a new leader. Although these were mostly great opportunities, they made me lose my concentration and delayed the process. This could be used as an excuse not to reach the goal; something that the theory stipulates could happen in case of failure. However, what I think is needed is for me to put more effort, determination and perseverance, as prescribed by the theory, and put the knowledge acquired to good use.

The theory also stipulates that all three linkages should be strong to be held responsible by self or others. Although there is no accountability process in place in regards to my achieving this goal or using the newly acquired skills, I feel a strong responsibility or duty as a longtime adult student at Northeastern University, as a parent and role model to my two adult children, and as an employee using employees’ reimbursement funding to better herself.

This study relates so much to my own life and educational experience that there could be concerns for bias. Having the opportunity to use my thesis to explore the post-educational experiences of graduates of a program that I have managed for the past seventeen years, and in which I am emotionally invested, could also raise concerns for bias. However, as a student researcher, I am aware of the ethical measures that can ensure the validity and reliability of the study. For instance, besides making sure that participants are given the opportunity to present
their own account of their experiences, other forms of validity required in the development of a qualitative study were also used. This approach is discussed in chapter three.

**Limitations of the Study**

To allow the researcher adequate time with each participant to collect a detailed account of their story and experience as required by the chosen method, this study was limited to six participants. Although the Northeast Labor Executive Program (NLEP) existed for more than 75 years and has more than 2000 graduates, the study only included graduates of two sessions, which were held in winter 2015 and winter 2016. In addition, since participants belong to diverse unions, nationally and internationally, and hold positions at different levels in their union, there may be concern that the findings might not apply to all. Labor leaders come from all walks of life, are recruited at different levels of education and in their union, so not everyone might be in position to effectuate change or be held accountable for their action or lack thereof.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Labor unions are institutions designed to organize workers and to build a culture of solidarity within the workplace (Fossom, 2006; Gray, 1975). As they mature and became more complex, labor unions consist of members who expect services, and of employees and elected officers to provide those services (Clark, 1989, 1992; Clark, Gray & Whitehead, 2012; Fossom, 2006; Rau, 2012). Some union officials are professional staff (Clark & Gray, 2008; Clark et al. 2012) and others are in positions of leadership as managers or executives (Clark, 1989, 1992; Clark, Gilbert, Gray & Solomon, 1998; Margolis, 2011; Rau, 2012, Weil, 1994). Accordingly, the career of union executives is devoted to advocating for working people and to leading their organizations and staff.

While the American labor movement has struggled with issues of internal administration, changing legislation, globalization, and technological advancement, the effort continues, and it is tougher now as union membership density continues to decline from over 30 percent in the 1950s to 20.1% in 1983, and 11.1% in 2014 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Labor organizations find themselves on the defensive (Clark & Gray, 2008) and are trying to maintain what they worked to accomplish over several decades, which is to represent as many employees as possible and in as many sectors as possible. Many have addressed the issues facing American labor unions. Some focus on the reasons for the decline (Godard, 2009; Slaughter 2007). Others advocate for labor law reform that could favor the integration of union for all employees (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Kochan, 2011; Kochan & Shulman, 2007). Many conclude that American labor unions need to re-strategize if they are to remain in existence (Kochan, 2011; Kochan & Shulman, 2007; Trumpka, 2009; Weil, 1994, 2005).
There have been some significant changes made within the labor movement. For instance, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which is the chief federation for most American labor unions, initiated the process of revitalization with a focus on administrative strategy used in regular organizations (Clark et al., 1998; Dunlop, 1990), on rejuvenation (Bielski, Grabelsky, Margolies & Reynolds, 2013; Clark et al., 1998), and on learning (Gray, 1975). Many unions have followed its lead (Bielski et al., 2013; Clark et al., 1998; Dunlop, 1990).

At the same time, for many years, the Northeast Labor Executive Program (NLEP) has been providing labor leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with these changes and challenges (Bok & Dunlop, 1970; Dunlop, 1990; Nesbit, 2002; Preparing Leadership for the Challenges of the Future, 2015, 2016). Thus, it is appropriate to examine the extent to which the skills and knowledge acquired through the NLEP are being used in the union organizations, and the extent to which labor leaders who have participated in the NLEP see themselves accountable for the effective use of newly acquired skills in their respective workplaces.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a case that will demonstrate how the NLEP has been providing labor leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to deal with the changes and challenges that they are facing, and how their affiliation to the labor movement and leadership positions make them accountable for the transfer of learning. To accomplish such an endeavor, the review will present two arguments: the discovery argument, which will elaborate on what is known about American labor unions in accordance with the NLEP, and the advocacy argument, which will help the researcher draw conclusions based on what has been discovered and establish the need for this empirical study (Machi & McEvoy, 2009).
Thus, to gather evidence related to this study, it is important to understand the evolution and purpose of the American labor unions. This will be the first strand and will help in placing the reader in the context. The second strand will present relevant literature on the administration of American labor unions, their structure and staffing needs, and the challenges labor leaders face in their fight to accomplish organizational goals, especially as it relates to the integration of the young generation. The third strand will examine relevant literature on pedagogies used in the development of labor leaders. This strand will also elaborate on the inception, evolution, and the role of the NLEP in that process. The fourth strand will present relevant literature on spiritual leadership, an emerging leadership theory that reflects union values and indicates how labor leaders can act and lead according to these values. The fifth strand will present relevant literature on transfer of learning. These findings will offer insights into the American labor movement, its learning needs and opportunities, and will establish a foundation for the argument of advocacy. The literature review will conclude with the argument of advocacy, which will address the possibilities for learning transfer and present a conclusion about the study based on findings presented by the argument of discovery and the need for this study.

**Argument of Discovery**

**Evolution of American Labor Unions**

Webb and Webb (1950) define labor unions as “a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives” (p. 1). Based on this definition, most researchers argue that this type of association has existed for quite some time, especially in Europe during the Middle Ages, and in England during the 1700s. In the United States, labor unions emerged at the end of the eighteenth century (Taft, 1964, p. 3). However, because of their short existence, early research focused more on the stable ones such
as the National Labor Union (NLU), which was created in 1866 and is often noted as the first national union (Dubofsky & Dulles, 2010). Another union of significant impact is the Knights of Labor, which was established first as a secret entity and became influential when it grew from 19,000 in 1878 to 700,000 members in 1886 (Dubofsky & Dulles, 2010; Taft, 1964). From 1836 to 1889, many new unions were created including many national and local unions. Ulman (1955) recorded a total of 79 unions, some of them still in existence. For instance, the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen, which established two full scholarships for their leaders to attend the NLEP, was formed in 1865. The United Brotherhood of Carpenters, which also has a scholarship for its leaders to attend the NLEP, was established in 1881.

As with any institution fulfilling the same roles and functions with people of diverse philosophies and cultures in position of leadership, conflict may arise. The Knights of Labor fulfilled the role of federation until some of its unions, in conflict with its leader’s philosophy, created a new federation, the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions (Dubofsky & Dulles, 2010; Fossom, 2006), which later became the American Federation of Labor. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) not only helped them in conflict resolution, but it also gave them the autonomy on their specific crafts, which was one of their concerns with the Knights of Labor (Dubofsky & Dulles, 2010; Fossom, 2006).

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the U.S. moving from an agrarian to an industrialized workforce (Craver, 2011), more and more unions were being formed and disappearing; however, by 1930 more than 152 unions were established (Dunlop, 1990; Ulman, 1955). With the AFL being restricted to craft unions only, a need was felt for an industrialized federation. Consequently, in late 1935, John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers spearheaded the founding of the Committee for Industrial Organization to organize these unions (Dubofsky &...
Dulles, 2010; Fossom, 2006). Initially the Committee and its industrial unions worked within the AFL. With people of color and women entering the workforce in great numbers at the time of World War II, the Committee was at an advantage. The rapid expansion of industrial unions in the late 1930s also generated conflict between the two. The committee split from the AFL forming many specific industrial unions to organize each group, including women and people of color, under the umbrella of their new chosen name, Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) (Taft, 1964). The split lasted from 1938 until they reunited in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO that is now in existence (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Taft, 1964).

The AFL-CIO serves as the chief federation of most unions in the U.S., with the national and international unions at the next level, and the local unions at the bottom (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). The AFL-CIO functions to guide unions as intended from the start. With the integration of the government in unions’ affairs through the enactment of legislation to regulate the relation between unions and employers, the AFL-CIO is also involved in lobbying of Congress. Moreover, since the merging of AFL and CIO, most national and international unions became affiliated with the AFL-CIO; however, in 2005, frustrated by the inability of the federation to remedy the decline in union membership, some of the largest national unions withdrew from the federation (Goddard, 2007) to form a new coalition called Change to Win (CTW) (Scully-Russ, 2006). While many of the unions that left have now returned to the AFL-CIO, CTW is still in existence. The AFL-CIO continues to support the remaining national and international unions and some independent locals. The national and international unions support the local unions, which maintain direct contact with union members (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). The question remains, what exactly is the purpose of unions?
Purpose of Organized Labor in United States

In describing the purpose of organized labor in the United States, one concept that comes to mind is the motto *United We Are Strong*. By joining forces, people are able to accomplish a lot in solidarity, and this is what organized labor does for the good of the working class. Instead of having to negotiate on one’s own behalf, unionized and prospective unionized workers have the strength of the collective voice negotiating on their behalf for better wages, working condition, and benefits through a process called collective bargaining (Craver, 2011; Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

Collective bargaining “involves periodic negotiations between unions and management over the terms of employment, and sometimes leads to grievance procedure and arbitration” (Dunlop, 1990, p. 125). The initial stage of grievances, a process that gives the employees the opportunity to voice their opinion on the way that they are being treated in the workplace (Craver, 2011), is handled by the local unions, which is the point of contact between workers and their unions (Fossom, 2006; Freeman & Medoff, 1984). This process usually starts with the direct supervisor and the union steward, and may continue with the involvement of top management and representatives from the national union, leading sometimes to the use of outside consultants to mediate or to arbitrate the process (Craver, 2011; Fossom, 2006).

Many have researched how the collective actions of unions have enhanced the economic benefits of union members. Although there is still no consensus on the impact of unions (Doucouliagos & Laroche, 2003; Freeman & Medoff, 1984), many have come to the conclusion that American unions have improved the social and economic conditions of their members (Kochan & Shulman, 2007). Bok and Dunlop (1970) argue that opinion polls done in the early 1960’s showed that a large majority of the American public approved of unions. Their view is
that this approval “seems to be rooted in a conviction that they are necessary to enable workers to receive improvements in wages and working conditions” (Bok & Dunlop, 1970, p. 13). While recent survey ratings show a fluctuation through the years (Bielski Boris, 2012), research on the purpose of organized labor in the United States has been the focus of many studies and most lean toward these two themes.

Freeman and Medoff, in their book entitled *What Do Unions Do?* (1984) argue that the average union worker can realize that her/his union representation provides her/him better wages and benefits as well as a voice in her/his workplace. They posit:

U.S. Trade unionism can best be understood by recognizing that unions have two faces, each of which leads to a different view of the institution: a monopoly face, associated with their monopolistic power to raise wages; and a collective voice/institutional response face, associated with their representation of organized workers within enterprises. (Freeman & Medoff, 1984, p. 6)

Their view is that unions have the power to raise wages and benefits for their members while also giving members a say in the way that they are treated in the workplace.

Many researchers argue that the monopolistic power of union affects unorganized employment, the economy, and productivity (Doucouliagos & Laroche, 2003). While the debate continues, it is worth mentioning however, that union monopoly is more a shared responsibility between management and labor done through bargaining (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). Because hikes in wages may lead employers to reduce employment, the power of unions is somehow limited leading them to sometimes cooperate with management and be more considerate in order to preserve jobs (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). It has also been argued that unions help even non-union workers who sometimes end up getting the same benefits from organizations fearing
unionization (Freeman & Medoff, 1984, Mishel & Walters, 2003). This can also be seen as an economic face through which members and non-union members are provided better wages and benefits, which not only helps the workers, but also the economy.

Workers, through collective action, are also given the opportunity to give input on their working conditions and are able to address their concerns to management through the collective voice. Using the exit theory advanced by Albert O. Hirschman (1970), Freeman and Medoff (1984) demonstrate how beneficial it can be for both workers and employers to avoid the exit option and negotiate for the well-being of all parties involved. The idea is that most workers who are dissatisfied with a work situation will leave to find something better, and depending on the situation, both the organizations and employees suffer from the exit situation by having to find another job or having to retrain new employees. While voice, as a channel of communication, gives the employee the opportunity to address an issue, a collective voice, which allows the individual to not only address the issue, but to change the circumstances and avoid the exit option, is more effective and beneficial for both parties (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

Kochan and Shulman (2007) address the same issue and present a framework based on moral foundation. Their framework, which emphasizes the following components: efficiency, dignity and social solidarity, expands Freeman and Medoff’s face and voice framework by adding a social justice component. At the same time, while Kochan and Shulman (2007) agree that unions with their enthusiasm and energy boosted workers to the next level and helped build the middle class, they argue that unions are failing to fulfill their intended purpose, which they see as a moral obligation, an argument that is seconded by Dawkins (2010) in his framework of union social responsibility.
Using theory and concepts from the business and society, business ethics and labor relations literature, Dawkins (2010) presents a conceptual framework of social responsibility of labor unions composed of three objectives, economic equity, workplace democracy and social justice and discusses its implications for future use. Dawkins found that his social responsibility framework is similar to Kochan and Shulman’s moral foundation of work framework, and are both closely related to the two faces of unions presented by Freeman and Medoff, a framework that he has also extended to include a social justice component (Dawkins, 2010). Their focus is on moral and social responsibility of unions which, they all agree upon, was the objective of organized labor from the start, a purpose, according to most, that unions are currently failing to fulfill (Kochan, 2011).

**Structure and Staffing Needs of American Labor Unions**

As mentioned earlier, labor unions in the U.S. started with groups of workers fighting for better wages and working conditions. As organizations mature and become more complex, more staff is usually needed to fulfill the diverse functions that this new bureaucracy generates (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). With workers’ needs becoming more and more complex in this new technological and globalized workplace, the American labor unions did not shy away from this concept advanced by those who studied organizational theories (Clark, 1989).

Thus, labor unions today, like any other bureaucratic organizations, have different levels of command and functions, and a multitude of professional staff are hired to perform these functions (Clark, 1989, 1992; Clark & Gray 1993; Rau, 2012). Today, besides their elected board composed of president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer, who usually participate in the NLEP, the staff list of most American unions include business agents, organizers, and staff representatives also in position of leadership (Clark, 1989; Clark & Gray 1993) and who also
participate in the NLEP. Moreover, physicians, economists, public relations professionals, lawyers, accountants as well as pilots constitute the staff of the union along with some technical and clerical staff (Clark, 1989, Clark & Gray 1993), to name a few.

Kaminski and Yakura (2008), in their study of women in union leadership, present a four-step process on how leadership emerged in the unions. The first step, which they entitled finding one’s voice, is about becoming aware of power that one has in the organization, something that is usually triggered by some unfair practices by someone in authority in the organization. This usually leads to involvement in the union through volunteering and becoming union activist. The next step, entitled developing skills, entails being involved in committee, finding a mentor and meeting with union leaders. In the third step, the activist learns about union politics and what it takes to get elected in leadership position. Once elected, the last step is about setting agenda for continuation, and this entails being able to please the members to remain in the position or move up to other levels in the unions. Although their study refers to a specific gender, it is comparable to Eaton’s (1992) five-step study of leadership emergence, which is more general and elaborates on the emergence of leadership from the workplace to the highest level of leadership in unions, and the federation.

**Relevant Literature on American Union Administration**

Early research done on the administration of American labor unions show that unions have been reluctant to use modern management techniques such as program budgeting, strategic planning and so on, which are essential to organizational efficiency (Bok & Dunlop, 1970; Clark, 1989; Dunlop, 1990) and widely used in most businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government organizations (Bok & Dunlop, 1970; Dunlop, 1990; Weil, 1994). Bok and Dunlop (1970) found that not much was known about the administration of unions. They posit:
If a labor leader is asked whether he has considered the use of planning or program
budgets, he is likely to reply that his union is devoted to helping its members and has no
need for the techniques developed by business concerns in their search for larger profits.
(Bok & Dunlop, 1970, pp. 139-140)

Moreover, they assert that other union leaders have claimed that “management techniques are not
readily transplanted to an organization that is frankly and explicitly political as union” (Bok &
Dunlop, 1970, p.40). These two statements refer to the fact that most labor leaders are elected to
their post from the rank, and their remaining in that post depends on how well they meet the
needs of the members. However, as Bok and Dunlop (1970) argue, what they forgot to consider
was that in order to achieve their goals of pleasing the members, people and resources must be
used efficiently.

Since the 1970s, however, much has happened that pressured union organizations to
reconsider their position in regarding mainstream techniques of management. While the
numbers of unions who had adopted these techniques were not substantial, there has been some
movement made toward improvement due to unions experiencing hard times in collective
bargaining, and with legislative and administrative issues (Dunlop, 1990). According to Dunlop
(1990), the power of leaders is limited in political organizations, especially as it relates to
managing staff, to fundraising, and keeping their post. However, he argues, “it would be idle to
insist that useful management choices at the margin, even in a heavy political environment, are
not vital to the achievement of organizational goals under the chronic conditions of a shortage of
resources” (Dunlop, 1990, p. 6).

To make his point, using executives of comparable organizations namely, businesses,
educational institutions, government and nonprofits, Dunlop (1990) found that the political and
democratic structure or culture within which union organizations operate, indeed, produce some differences in the function of union executives compared to executives of these organizations. At the same time, as it relates to the performance of executives in these fields, while their power and influence may differ, there are indeed some commonalities in the way they should operate. He posits, “Environmental assessment, setting goals and priorities, the shaping of the structure of an organization and its operations, the selection and development of people, and the introduction of innovation and change” (Dunlop, 1990, p. 25) should be at the top of the list of every executive (Dunlop, 1990).

The point is that executives of all fields need not only to understand the environment in which they operate, but also to be able to articulate it to the organization along with the changes that could occur in the short and long run (Dunlop, 1990; Weil, 1994). Moreover, it is also their responsibility to articulate and to set priorities to overcome obstacles brought around by the environment (Dunlop, 1990; Weil 1994).

The selection and development of people is also of great concern to executives of all these organizations. Dunlop (1990) argues that staff “need to be selected and recruited, trained, educated, moved about, promoted, motivated, compensated, and rewarded, and even disciplined” (p. 11). With the performance of an organization depending on its human resources (Rau, 2012), the selection and development of people is also at the center of the functions of the executive (Dunlop, 1990).

Moreover, knowing how to shape the structure of an organization, how to negotiate and build consensus inside and outside the organization, how to grow with time, and how to change and innovate is also of great importance to the survival of any organization. All these functions can be accomplished while dealing with assessing the environment, setting and articulating
priorities, and the selection and development of staff, all of which are part of strategic planning (Dunlop, 1990, Weil 1994).

Stratton and Reshef (1990) argue that labor unions are able to engage in strategic planning as they can show that they are proactive by “attempting to favorably mold their changing environment to best satisfy their union’s objectives” (Stratton & Reshef, 1990, p. 82). Weil (1994) posits that after the shortfalls of the 1980s, the American labor unions saw some improvements and successes in the 1990s due in part to the use of strategic planning and the different principles outlined above. According to Weil (1994), the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW) succeeded in establishing themselves at Harvard because of their use of strategic planning. They studied the environment and the many challenges that they were facing, and with time and tactics, they finally arrived at convincing the university that their white collar workers should be unionized (Weil, 1994). Since then, the HUCTW model has been an example for other universities and other institutions in general (Weil, 1994). Many other unions such as the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) and the Farm Labor Organization Committee (FLOC) have also been successful with the use of strategic planning (Weil, 1994).

Since the 1990, with the decline in union membership reducing union resources, many more unions considered the use of strategic planning. Clark, in conjunction with many of his colleagues, elaborates on the internal administration of American unions, focusing mostly on the application of strategic planning and the integration of new human resource practices (Rau, 2012). In their 1998 study, Clark et al. compared union administrative practices in Canada, United Kingdom and United States and found that unions were slowly changing to adapt mainstream management techniques such as budgeting, strategic planning and human resource
policies. In 2008, using data from the same study, Clark and Gray revisited these practices in American unions and found that unions are more and more using strategic planning and are also becoming more professionalized by hiring from the outside of their ranks candidates holding specific college degrees and technology skills. Revisited in 2010 and 2012 by Clark et al., these new studies reaffirm the use of professional staff in unions and the continual integration of mainstream administrative practices. Moreover, in her study of factors that influence the adoption of new human resource practices in American unions, Rau (2012) presents a framework of external and internal forces that should influence the use of effective human resource techniques in both nonprofit and public organizations.

**Challenges in Leading and Advocating for Working People**

One of the factors that shape the context in which labor unions operate is the demographic of the working population and people’s attitude about the unions (Weil, 1994). While many agree that the collective actions of unions have helped many members move up from one class to another, much more needs to be done for labor unions to continue to achieve this goal (Kochan, 2011). Due to anti-union legislation and employers’ resistance to union, people are losing their voice in the workplace, wages are staggering (Kochan, 2011), and the younger generation, which according to most, is the future of the labor movement (Bielski Boris, Grabelsky, Margolies, & Reynolds, 2013; Trumka, 2009) is not fully represented (Trumka, 2009). Because of the low rate of unionization of young workers, due in part to how and where they work, examples of that are the gig economy and food industries, which remained to be unionized (Bryson, Gomez, Gunderson, & Meltz, 2005), many advance that young workers are not interested in unions. However, many studies have refuted this notion and found that young workers are more supportive of unions than older generations (Gallager & Friorito, 2005;
Madland & Teixera, 2008) and will vote for a union if given the opportunity to do so (Freeman & Rogers, 1999). What is needed, however, is a change in strategy to attract the young generation of workers (Trumka, 2009).

In 2009, in a speech to the Center for American Progress, Richard Trumka, the then Secretary-Treasurer and now current President of the AFL-CIO, emphasized the need for the American labor unions to re-strategize. One of the strategies presented was the integration of the young generation. He stated: “the challenge facing unions isn’t just to change the way labor laws work; it’s to change the way we work. It’s to reconfigure ourselves to respond to the needs of a new generation of working Americans” (Trumpka, 2009, p. 476). He argued that contrary to popular beliefs, the young generation is interested in unions. They know what unions can do, he stated; however, their resistance is due to the fact that “unions do not fit the way they work” (Trumpka, 2009, p. 476). He emphasized the fact that this young generation mortgaged their future to educate themselves, and while he understood that this was not the primary function of unions, he thinks that helping the young generation should be a priority. He then urged unions to change their approach to address the need of this young generation, who is the future of the American unions, and who is in dire need of help. He advanced that “union leaders need to capture the imagination of the young generation” (Trumpka, 2009, p. 476) in order to remain in existence.

That same year, “acknowledging the centrality of that challenge” (Bielski Boris et al., 2013, p. 228), the AFL-CIO initiated that move with the launching of several programs to attract and involve youth in the labor movement, one of them being the young workers outreach program (Bielski Boris et al., 2013). The American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), one of the largest affiliated unions of the AFL-CIO, followed the lead in
2009 with their Next Wave move (Bielski Boris, 2015). Since then, many other unions have followed. While research conducted by Bielski Boris and her colleagues indicate that it is a step in the right direction, they also found challenges that need to be addressed for unions to arrive at the desired objectives of succession planning (Bielski Boris, 2015; Bielski Boris et al., 2013). One of the most critical challenges mentioned is the reluctance of the older generation to the integration of the younger generation for fear of being replaced by them before due time.

**Pedagogies of Union Leadership Training**

Since the beginning of the American labor movement, education has been at the forefront of labor organizations (Gray, 1966; Nesbit, 2002). The following literature sheds light on the educational practices and the role of the NLEP in fulfilling the needs of union leadership.

The massive immigration after World War II and the industrialization of the country necessitated a new form of education, and the progressive movement, which led to the creation of adult education, helped in the process (Elias & Meriam, 2005). This movement happened at a time that the United States was undergoing major changes politically, economically and socially, and it helped many adjust to their new lives (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). As progressives placed a big emphasis on social change, education was used as an instrument for social change not only to assist the learner in adjusting to the current situation or society, but also to prepare individuals to promote and instigate social change (Elias & Meriam, 2005).

This new progressive movement took a learner-centered, practical, utilitarian, and democratic approach to learning (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Extension school, with its emphasis on vocational programs, utilitarian training, learning by experience, community involvement and responsiveness to social problems, generated from this movement and helped in the development of more adult educational programs (Elias & Merriam, 2005), one of them being the executive
programs. Labor education, which is a specialized branch of adult education characterized by its content and affiliation with the labor movement (Gray, 1966), also generated from this movement.

While the major elements of progressive education are found in the work of major theorists of adult education, such as Malcolm Knowles, Carl Rogers, Cyril Houle, Ralph Tyler, Edward Lindeman, Paul Bergevin, and Paulo Freire, John Dewey was the most prominent and influential (Elias & Merriam 2005). He was very much involved in all aspects of the progressive movement such as political, economic, educational and social reform (Elias & Meriam, 2005). His work, which is enormous, included all elements of the progressive movement such as integration of socialization with the academic disciplines, advocating for lifelong learning and integration of practical, pragmatic and utilitarian skills into the curriculum as well as centrality of experience. Learners’ needs and interest were also emphasized leading to a new method of teaching that placed both teachers and students as learners (Elias & Meriam, 2005). Developed at a time of tumult to bring about change, this teaching method was efficiently used in the education of labor leaders.

Paulo Freire with his focus on “the poor, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised people of the world – ordinary people” (Hurst, 2002, pp. 11-12) also contributed to the advancement of the workers with his critical form of education entitled popular education. According to Bernard (2002a) this approach to teaching is also “well suited for adult learners” and is increasingly being adopted in the labor movement due to its critical reflective practice. She argues, “The real power of popular education is not its form but its content. The core content of popular education is critical thinking and empowerment” (Bernard, 2002a, p. 7), which is a tool that can instigate that change in labor leaders and help them in accomplishing their goal of advocating for workers.
Another form of pedagogy used in the development of labor leaders is the case method, which has been the method of choice of Harvard Business School since its inception in 1908 and is being used by other management programs throughout the world (Corey, 1998; as cited in Bernard, 2002b). Bernard (2002b) posits, “This hands-on, experiential approach to learning is also ideally suited for engaging experienced union leaders in discussion of strategic choice, organizational change, union structure, and ways to change the approach to organizing and representation” (p. 219). She argues:

By describing real-life union predicaments, case method has an immediate relevance for union leaders…. For activists who have been out of the classroom for many years, and for those who question the relevance of formal education for union leaders, cases immediately engage learners both intellectually and emotionally. Rather than discussing abstract concepts and principles, learners are able to develop generalized principles through analyzing actual union situations. (Bernard, 2002b, p. 220)

With its learner-centered approach, the case method moves away from the traditional lecture style of teaching, giving participants the opportunity to be the center of attention while the teacher plays a role of facilitator (Bernard, 2002b). Although similar to case studies, as they both provide information for analysis, case method information is shorter in length as it is designed as a teaching tool, and the information given to students is mostly to provoke analytical in class discussion (Bernard, 2002b). As such, it is comparable to popular education, and “the process is as important as the outcome. And the outcome for individual learners depends not only on their individual effort but on the collective effort of the entire class” (Bernard, 2002b, p. 226).

In 2003, Kaminski presented a new approach to union leadership teaching based on storytelling. She argues that storytelling is a good teaching tool to use with union leaders as it is
relatable, it triggers memory, and it has the power to move people, which is what is needed to
instigate change in people. The process entails the use of analytical stories that the instructor
provides coupled with the learner’s personal story. This framework can also be effective in
helping the learners in finding their voice, developing basic skills, figuring out the politics, and
modeling others’ behavior (Kaminski, 2003).

Although her approach was designed for the development of women union leaders, she
mentioned that it can be used in any union leadership program. And while it has not been
evaluated yet, previous participants are now using it in their own workshop programs, and it has
been well received (Kaminski, 2003). With its focus on empowerment, this teaching method
could also be effective in helping labor leaders accomplish their goals. What is the role of the
NLEP in the development of labor leaders?

The Inception and Evolution of the Northeast Labor Executive Program

Historical records show that the Northeast Labor Executive Program (NLEP), the first
executive program for labor leaders in the United States, began around the end of World War II,
a time when the labor movement was in turmoil nationally and internationally and workers were
displeased with their status and inability to advance. With labor tumult escalating to its highest
since the recession of 1937 and with the passing of new restrictive legislation, labor leaders
needed new insightful labor relations concepts and principles to adequately and correctly achieve
the goal of the labor movement and advocate for working people without adverse consequences.
To that end, William Green, the late president of the AFL-CIO, initiated the request for the
creation of a university program that would “satisfy the demand for administrative training and
responsible leadership” (Adams, 1994, p. 11).
Upon approval from the President of the chosen University and the University Board, an economics professor along with a labor economist professor, from that University, co-founded the Northeast Labor Executive Program under the name of the Northeast Labor Fellowship Program (NLFP). Started in October of 1942 with fourteen labor leaders, recruited from the most prominent unions of that time, the nine-month, residential program was designed “to provide training for executive responsibility in the union and to help union officials play more useful and important role in the labor movement and in the life of the community” (internal memo, n. d.).

With requirements for admission being that the “applicant had a record of successful experience in the labor movement” (Adams, 1994, p. 16) and a commitment for continuing involvement, the NLFP only accepted participants from union sponsorships. The NLFP also urged unions to only send people who were duly devoted to the labor movement, and whom they could promote to leadership position after attending the program (Trumpbour, 2012). As most unions wanted to get their money’s worth, they made sure that all participants in the Labor Fellowship Program were indeed worth the investment (Adams, 1994). While fellowship at the University, in which NLFP operated, required advanced study in a particular field of study, requirement for admission to the Northeast Labor Fellowship Program was completely different. Adams (1994) mentions that “a 1957 internal memo reported that students ranged from those who had not completed elementary school to those with advanced degrees, including doctorates” (p. 16).

Since its inception in 1942, the Northeast Labor Fellowship Program sought to provide participants the same advanced education that the University offers to executive-level individuals from the field of business and government. According to Adams (1994) and Trumpbour (2012),
NLEP courses were taught by that University distinguished faculty and personnel, and contrary to regular lecture style, which were commonly used in higher education, the program used the case method, with classroom discussions, as the primary teaching strategy (Bernard, 2002b). Participants in the Northeast Labor Fellowship Program also had access to the entire resources of the university including access to regular courses with regular Northeast University students if they could be accommodated (Adams, 1994). Moreover, some of the NLFP courses were taken jointly with graduate students, and the rest of the curriculum was limited to a set of labor management courses designed especially for them. For instance,

- Economics Analysis prepared students to analyze the economic condition of corporations.
- Trade Union Problems and Politics covered actual problems encountered by national union officers.
- Human Problems of Administration involved the psychological study of how groups worked. The course also examined job evaluation plans and the principles of time study. (Adams, 1994, p. 12)

In 1949, to accommodate the need of most labor organizations, which could not afford to release their labor leaders for such long period of time, the program was changed to thirteen weeks (Trumpbour, 2012). In 1955, realizing that the merging of the American Federation of Labors (AFL) with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) could be very challenging to the leadership of the American labor unions, the program changed its focus to provide more policy and administration courses such as Economic Analysis, Problems in Labor Relations, Method of Wages Determination, Accounting and Analysis, Parliamentary Procedure, American Labor History, and Labor Law (Adams, 1994; Trumpbour, 2012). This was a very strategic
move as several years later, in 1959, Congress passed the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act or the Landrum-Griffin Act (Fossom, 2006).

Because more disputes erupted between labor and management, arbitration, which help in solving labor management disputes, as well as seminars on collective bargaining became part of the curriculum. Around that time, NLEP participants also had the opportunity to take joint classes with corporate managers from the advanced management program at that University Business School, whom they were facing in dispute resolution in manufacturing workplaces (Trumpbour, 2012). In the early 1980s, however, with the offshoring of manufacturing jobs, which directed most corporate managers to non unionized workplaces, such as the banking industry, the blending of the two oldest executive programs at that University ended (Trumpbour, 2012). This off-shoring of manufacturing and move to a service-oriented workforce also accelerated the decline of union membership density in the U.S.

The Role of the NLEP in the Development of Union Leaders in the 80s and Beyond

The 1980s was a period of decline for the labor movement, and the decline continues through this day. Many have attributed the decline to environmental factors, such as the growth of a service economy and employment, and the wider use of technology (Stratton & Reshef, 1990). These changes also contributed to a shift in the demographics of the labor force as these newly created service jobs were attracting women, retirees, part-timers, immigrants and highly educated and mobile workers (Stratton & Reshef, 1990). Thus, with a diversified, technologically global workforce, managing union organizations has become more complex and requires a leadership more attuned to the needs of this new generation of workers and members. The NLEP, being mindful about the need of labor union administrations, has changed its curriculum to offer courses that deal with these issues. Although the criteria for admission to the
program remain the same, the ten-week executive program had been shortened to a six-week intensive program and runs from the beginning of January to mid February annually. The curriculum is now composed of the following core courses that highlight the current changes in the world of work:

- **Leadership and Organizational Change** focuses on the importance of leadership and its function in forging a common sense of purpose for the union and in leading the organization in an increasingly challenging environment.

- **Turning Points in U.S. Labor History** investigates the role of workers and their unions in the United States since 1870 and concentrates on key moments of transition in union development.

- **Strategic Public Sector Labor Relations** explores labor/management relations in the public sector while emphasizing the role of unions in assuring quality work and employees’ wages and benefits.

- **Capital Strategies for Labor** explores new roles that labor has adopted to influence the investment of pension funds.

- **Managing Dispute Resolution Systems** focuses on how to manage the dispute resolution process, how to cut the costs of arbitration, how to make it more efficient, and how to minimize the use of lawyers.

- **Strategic Choice for Labor Unions Leaders** presents a framework to guide union leaders in making strategic choices in this changing world. (*Northeast Labor Executive Program Curriculum*, 2015, 2016)

Another course worth mentioning is entitled “Social Theories, Leadership and You” (*Northeast Labor Executive Program Curriculum*, 2015, 2016). Although not a core course of the program,
this course has been offered for the past eight years and has been well received. Through this course, participants are given the tools that could guide them in the self-assessment that is needed to effectively lead their organization in this challenging environment. Burke (2002) posits:

Leadership is about influence, not command and control. To be successfully influential requires personal skills such as active listening, persuasion, empathy, and being aware of how one as a leader is affecting others and in turn how one is being personally affected by others. (p. 243)

On the same issue, Fullan (2008) argues, “people need to be able to compare themselves with themselves over time to assess their progress in achieving important personal goals and organizational goals” (p. 103). Heifetz and Linsky in their book entitled Leadership on the Line (2002) also emphasize the importance of leaders to take time to attend to personal needs, and the only way to do that is by knowing oneself, which is the focus of this course. Knowing oneself allows leaders to take a step back, when needed, to reflect on the situation. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) refer to the process as “Achieving a balcony perspective” (p. 52), which is a metaphoric act of observing what is going on with everyone including oneself and is a necessary practice in order to plan, strategize and survive. The question that needs to be answered here is how can the application of the skills be measured?

Reflecting Union Values through Spiritual Leadership in this New Era

Eaton (1992) argues, “If leaders do not constantly articulate and act according to labor’s core values and vision of social and economic justice, inclusion, human development and hope, they have little chance of successfully mobilizing their members over the long term” (p. 6). Trumpka (2009) emphasizes the same issues when he urged union leaders to change their
approach to meet the needs of the younger generation and lead with union values. Spiritual leadership, which focuses on fairness, moral ethic, responsibility, and interconnectedness to name a few, exemplifies these concepts.

Deviating from the religious connotation of the term spiritual and rejecting the traditional form of leadership based on power, influence and prestige, Fairholm (1996) is credited for being the first one to combine these two terms by presenting a framework of leadership founded on morality, stewardship, and commitment (Fernando, 2011). According to Fairholm, a focus on these concepts can intrinsically motivate a person to give her/his best. Several years later, in his attempt toward a theory of spiritual leadership, Fry (2003) establishes a relation between intrinsic motivation and elements of workplace spirituality, vision, hope/faith, altruistic love. His idea is that, as most people are looking for a sense of accomplishment in the workplace, a focus on these terms can satisfy these needs and in turn motivate individuals in giving their best to the organization.

Consequently, drawing from his 2003 theory of spiritual leadership, workplace spirituality and capitalism, Fry and Slocum (2008) show how the combination of vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, calling and membership can lead to organizational commitment. The next year, Fry and Cohen (2009) present Fry’s model of spiritual leadership as a paradigm that can make people see their work as a calling, gain a sense of membership, which can, in turn, benefit all parties. In another study, still drawing from his theory and integrating the leaders’ value, beliefs and self-identity, Sweeney and Fry (2012) present another model of spiritual leadership that they see as part of character development.

The world of the modern organization is complex and filled with challenges, something that Dunlop (1990) predicted would happen in the information age. With all the changes in the
world of work, organizations realized that leadership is no longer a one person show but more of a tripod composed of a leader, a follower and a goal to be accomplished (Bennis, 2007). Since then, new types of leadership, which take into consideration the relation between followers and leaders, the environment, and context, emerged (Schwandt & Szabla, 2007). Thus, to survive and prosper, organizations are urged to provide a climate that allows for participation of all its members (Crossan, Lane, & White 1999; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). This means that all members of the organization should be aware of the organization’s goals and vision and be able and willing to participate in decision making by evaluating and offering solutions to any issues (Senge, 1990). This can only be accomplished by the organization’s leadership being confident enough to allow everyone’s participation in decision making.

There is a need for more value-oriented leadership in the workplace lately. Although spiritual leadership appears to be an emerging leadership style, the different concepts or values that it comprises are concepts that have been raised in the workforce for quite sometimes by labor union organizations whose mission is to fight for fair treatment, fair wages, workers dignity and the like. What is needed now is a refocus of labor leaders’ commitment, values, and responsibility to rise to the challenge, thus the need for this study.

With its focus on accountability/responsibility, this study will explore the commitment of labor leaders in leading with union values, which should have incited them to put their best effort to learn while in the program and motivate them to bring the newly acquired learning in their respective workplace to benefit their unions, the labor movement, and society at large.

Relevant Literature on Transfer of Learning

There have been concerns about the transfer of learning for decades, and many have tried to address the issue, some focusing on effectiveness of training (Arguinis & Kraiger, 2009;
Clardy, 2005; Cullen & Turnbull, 2005; Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger & Smith-Jentsch, 2012), and others on factors that can enhance transfer of learning (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Caffarella, 2013; Caffarella & Daffron (2002); Sacks & Belcourt, 2006; Velada et al., 2007; Wlodkowski, 2008).

Looking at motivation as a construct that could influence transfer of learning, Pugh and Bergin (2006) present an analysis of both constructs. Focusing on the following motivational constructs, namely: achievement goals, interest, self-efficacy, and intention to transfer, they came to the conclusion that there is in fact some impact. Though they cannot completely confirm the intensity of the impact, they predict that these motivational factors can influence transfer of learning in the initial learning by hindering or supporting the transfer, in the initiation of transfer attempts, and in persistence of transfer. Still on the construct of motivation, Cheng and Hampton (2008) found that transfer research has not addressed the difference between measuring transfer as a “can do” versus a “will do” construct.

Wlodkowski in his 2008 book entitled *Adult Motivation to Learn* also emphasizes the effect of motivation on learning and how such motivation to learn usually leads to transfer of learning. He argues, “Adults who begin a learning experience with sincere intentions to transfer what they learn to their work have stronger and more persistent motivation than do adults who adopt a *wait-and-see* attitude” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 355). At the same time, he advances, “Learners who complete a learning experience feeling motivated about what they have learned seem more likely to have a continuing interest in and to use what they have learned” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 6). Wlodkowski also highlights responsibility and the need for the adult learner to be competent as mechanisms of motivation. He mentions, “Responsibility is the cornerstone of adult motivation” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 96). He further argues, “Adults by
social definition, economic need, and institutional expectation are responsible people who seek to enhance their lives through learning that develops their competence” (Wlodkowski, 2008, pp. 97-98).

Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe (2007) studied leadership development. In this study, their focus was to understand what contribute to transfer of soft skills. Findings show that course content can influence the transfer of learning. They also found that actual utilization of newly learned skills is influenced differently than judgments about the value of the training. Moreover, fear of breaking cultural norms is a greater inhibitor of transfer, and having other managers or leaders who received the same training is seen as remedy to the impediment. Social support, which entails encouragement and verbal praise, is associated with positive judgment of the training not utilization; however, observing others use the skills, mentoring and coaching others, which are a kind of support, is very effective in effecting utilization, and this is effective because others including the boss participated or received the same training. More recently, using data from 235 law enforcement leaders who participated in leadership development training, Hutchins, Nimon, Bates and Holton (2013) examined the relationship between the Learning Transfer Systems Inventory (LTSI) and intent to transfer. Findings show that motivation to transfer, transfer design, and transfer performance expectations have the strongest relationship with intent to transfer.

With accountability recently becoming an issue of great importance in organizations (Hess, 2007), others have tried to address the issue with a focus on accountability. For instance, Sacks and Belcourt (2006) present post-training reports as one of the mechanisms of accountability that can foster transfer of learning from training to the workplace. Their argument is that if trainees know from the start that they will have to report on their learning, more effort
will be put forth to learning. Taylor, Russ-Eft and Chan (2005) propose sanctions and rewards as accountability mechanisms that can motivate people to act. Again, the idea is that if people know that they will be rewarded or sanctioned, more effort will be put forth not only to acquire the learning, but also to apply the learning.

Moreover, Burke and Saks (2009) in their study of learning transfer describe accountability as a process with major impact on the transfer of learning as people are more likely to execute when held at a standard of accountability. They argue, “all stakeholders can (and should) be held accountable for transfer and the transfer related activities that they can affect” (Burke & Sacks, 2009, p. 383). Considering the amount of investment and organizations expectation of returns from their investments, a gap in studies focusing on accountability for transfer of learning still remains. Acknowledging the gap both in theoretical research and in research focusing on accountability, Burke and Sacks (2009) suggest Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy and Doherty’s (1994) Accountability Pyramid “as a prosperous and theoretically grounded guide for research and practice on training transfer accountability” (p. 392).

While there has been a lot written on the issue of transfer of training, “Very little research exists on transfer of leadership training” (Gilpin-Jackson, & Bushe, 2007, p. 1000), and so little empirical evidence is available on executive/academic programs for labor leaders, which, as mentioned earlier, requires a different approach to leadership teaching. There is also a need for more theoretical study focusing on accountability of transfer of learning. This study, which is guided by Schlenker’s (1997) theory of personal responsibility and focuses on the post-educational experiences of labor leaders as it relates to their experience with transfer of learning, will hopefully help in filling a gap in the training transfer literature.
Argument of Advocacy

“The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.”

James Baldwin, A Talk to Teachers

Utilization of Newly Acquired Learning in the Workplace

Since the beginning of the Labor movement, labor leaders have been inspired by the values that labor produces wealth and that the productive class should be fairly compensated for their hard work (Fossum, 2006). These progressive values, which according to Trumka (2009) are still primary principles, motivated them to exert the efforts needed to accomplish their goals of protecting workers’ rights. Based on what we know about the purpose of American labor unions, and the challenges labor leaders face especially as it relates to the integration of the young generation in the labor movement, how can participants of the program make use of the new learning in the workplace?

There is an old saying that the labor movement is “pale, male and stale”. Elaine Bernard, former Executive Director of the Labor and Worklife Program, calls it “labor’s PMS problem”. This needs to change, and although there is nothing that can be done in regard to the labor union being “pale and male”, except to let time take its course, much can be done to make sure that union organizations do not remain stale. And one way this can be accomplished is for graduates of the NLEP to become agents of change.

Fullan (2008) argues, “Another way to love your employees is to select them well and then invest in their continuous development” (p. 57). Addressing the issues facing this new generation is one way to capture the attention of this young generation. Recruiting them as staff
to be groomed into the leadership of the union is another way to assist them and address the challenges that labor organizations are facing now, which can be worse in the near future as the baby boomers who occupy most of the leadership position in American unions are near retirement (Bielski Boris, 2013). If something is not done, this will leave a gap in the union workforce that could lead to the disappearance of the institution (Trumpka, 2009).

Evidence shows that one of the functions of unions is to advocate for people in needs. Evidence also shows that the young generation is in dire need of help after mortgaging their future trying to educate themselves. Evidence shows that there is a new pool of talent that needs to be explored. Evidence also shows that this new pool of talent is open to unions. With unions having well-established human resource practices and the ability to hire from outside their ranks, union leaders should focus on recruiting this new generation. While recruiting can help in the short run, labor leaders should also focus on not only retaining, but also making sure that this new generation of members/staff are well taken care of, by focusing on developing them, so they can become the leaders of tomorrow. Evidence also shows that leading with union values can assist union leaders in accomplishing these goals.

To date, 75 years later, internal records show that almost 3,000 labor leaders from more than 100 unions in the United States and abroad have participated in the NLEP. Some participants have been staff representatives with specific line of responsibility, and others are full-time officers in “middle” or “advanced” administrative positions. Evidence shows that the Northeast Labor Executive Program has provided participants with the tools needed to responsibly lead in this changing world. The questions remain. Are the skills being transferred to the workplace? What can be done to assist in the effective transfer of learning? This study will help labor leaders rethink, re-strategize, and refocus their purpose and achieve their goals,
which could be to revitalize their unions, reaching out to the young generation as union members or as union staff or both. If the study concludes that the graduates of the NLEP are in need of continuous help for the effective transfer of learning, it could also help the program in restructuring its offerings to help union leaders achieve their goals.

With union membership declining around the world, one of the pressing goals of the labor movement is to revitalize the unions. In fact, most of the graduates of the NLEP emphasized the need to educate the young generation about the advantages that the labor unions offer to employees and members. In so doing, their goal is to recruit, retain and develop future leaders to bring about that change so much needed. Accordingly, the goal of this study is to explore how graduates of the NLEP can use the skills acquired at the NLEP to recruit, retain, and develop young leaders and establish a path for succession. The NLEP courses are of great importance to the development of labor leaders and in assisting them in overcoming these new challenges especially as they relate to the revitalization of the unions and the development of a new generation of leaders.

The labor education literature is well documented with research focusing on its forms, goals, and approaches (Bernard, 2002a, 2002b; Carlson, 1971; Dwyer, 1977; Gray, 1966, 1975; Kaminski, 2003), to name a few. According to Nesbitt (2002), a gap exists in the labor education literature as it relates to discussion and analysis of opportunities for leadership training in labor unions. This study, which will provide an opportunity for discussion on the learning opportunity provided by the NLEP to labor leaders from all over the world and their role in making sure that the learning provided is put to good use and benefits their union organizations and the labor movement, will hopefully add a drop in the bucket. Moreover, in chapter one, the researcher demonstrated that there was a theoretical gap that needed to be filled in the transfer
literature. Thus, the application of the personal responsibility theory in this study will help fill the gap.
Chapter III: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning making of the post-educational experience of graduates of an executive program for labor leaders as it relates to transferring what they have learned in the program to their respective union or the labor movement. To keep align with the chosen methodology, the conceptual framework and the goal of the study, the following question guided the study: How do graduates of an executive program for labor leaders make sense of their post-educational experience as it relates to the transfer of learning from the program to the workplace?

Strategy of Inquiry

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue, which can not be assessed using a quantitative method, needs to be explored. In such instance, variables are usually unknown, and the purpose of the study is to discover the meaning that participants “ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Trying to gain insight into the world of the Northeast Labor Executive Program graduates was the purpose of this study and as such required a qualitative approach. Qualitative study is also conducted when there has not been much written about a topic or a specific population, or when there is a lack of exploratory research built on participants’ perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2013). While there has been a lot written on the issue of transfer of training, the majority of current work focuses on hard skills training that is done internally by organizations. Very little empirical evidence is available on executive/academic programs for labor leaders. Consequently, an exploratory approach allowing social interaction between researcher and participants was best suited to collect firsthand data needed for this study. This approach places the researcher in the participant’s world or setting to observe and interview participants to acquire the data needed.
Such approach is said to be inductive as the finding will derive from the data collected from the interaction between researcher and participants, not from the testing of theories, which is said to be deductive and is mostly used in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002; Thomas 2006).

Creswell (2014) posits that approach to research not only involves the strategy and methods, but also philosophical assumptions that may influence the study as well as the researchers’ choice of a specific design. Creswell (2014) also argues that we all live in a world of meaning making, so whenever researchers entertain the idea of a qualitative study, philosophical assumptions regarding reality, knowledge, values, rhetoric and methods need to be considered. The reason is that each individual sees the world differently, and her/his interpretation of the event or experience could be her/his own reality. Consequently, when considering a qualitative study in which participants will be asked to give their opinions and insights, to reflect on their experience, and to present the truth, reality will be as diverse as the number of participants (Merriam, 2002). And these subjective meanings or knowledge are usually captured or acquired through social interaction between participants and researcher (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002; Thomas 2006).

As participants are as involved as the researcher in the construction of the data, the social constructivist paradigm was used to guide this study. Proponents of the constructivist paradigm hold the idea that “reality is constructed in the mind of the individual” (Hanson, 2004, as cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129), and it will take a hermeneutic approach and reflective interactions between participants and researcher to uncover the meanings that participants ascribed to their experience (Ponterotto, 2005). As an anchor for the study, the constructivist’s goal is to ensure that the voice of the participant is heard through researcher’s interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005).
Butin (2010) and Creswell (2013) emphasize the use of the interpretivist paradigm in a qualitative study as it usually sets the context for the study and also allows the researcher the opportunity to describe the experience according to the participants’ point of view. Data is then collected through interactions between participants and researcher.

As the primary instrument for collection and analysis of data (Merriam, 2002), and following the philosophical assumptions just mentioned above, the role of the researcher in this study was to make sure to present the findings from the point of view of the participants using their own words. The researcher had to get as close as possible to the participants, creating an atmosphere of trust to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experience. Biases and values were also revealed in advance, bracketing oneself to make sure that the final product only reflected the view of the participants.

**Research Tradition**

Research tradition refers to procedures use by researchers to gather, analyze and interpret data (Creswell, 2014). This study uses the “general inductive approach” (GIA) (Thomas, 2006, p. 237) also refers as a “basic interpretive study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4), an inductive analysis research approach that has been used mostly in health psychology, and educational sciences (Merriam, 2002). Contrary to other qualitative approaches which require the researcher to use specific terms or methodology, this approach offers researchers involved in qualitative evaluation studies an easy to follow, straightforward approach for the collection and analysis of their data (Thomas, 2006). According to Merriam (2002) its focus is to describe the meanings that people give to their major choices or experiences with a phenomenon. As the process of meaning-making involves thoughts, and reflections and requires participants’ involvement in the
production of the data, an inductive analysis research approach was best suited and offered the researcher the tools needed in the development of this research.

The process of the inductive analysis study is “the development of categories into a model or framework that summarizes the raw data and conveys key themes and processes” (Thomas, 2006, p. 240). This is accomplished through reading and re-reading of raw data and the interpretation of the raw data by the researcher, who, as the key research instrument, should be equipped with certain skills enabling her/him to establish trust with the participants and to decipher the meaning that participants make of their experiences (Merriam, 2002; Thomas, 2006). The researcher should also make sure that a “rich descriptive account of the findings is presented and discussed, using references to the literature that frame the study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). It is also recommended that the researcher is able “to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). This entails making sure that “these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

Looking at the research questions for this study, an inductive approach was ideal as it allowed the researcher the opportunity to evaluate the program through the experience of the participants, which helped in deciphering what works and what does not work, as suggested by Thomas (2006).

**Participants and Access**

As mentioned in Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling is mostly used in qualitative study to help researchers in their quest for understanding of the research problems and a specific phenomenon. Thus, participants are chosen because of what they can contribute to the study. In this particular study, the researcher used maximum variation and purposeful sampling to find a
group of participants who had experienced the phenomenon, and for whom the research questions were significant (Creswell, 2013), so much as they were able to provide rich data on the topic. Criterion sampling is another form of purposeful sampling that can also be used in the selection of the participants for a GIA study, and this entails selecting participants based on certain criteria (Creswell, 2013). In this particular study, the criterion was that participants were graduates of the 2015 and 2016 sessions of the Northeast Labor Executive Program, sessions that ran respectively from January 12 to February 20, 2015 and January 11 to February 19, 2016. The rationale for the date was that training transfer is best experienced and recalled within one year of attending a training program (Saks, 2002).

**Relation to Participants**

As the administrative director of the Northeast Labor Executive Program, I am responsible for the convening of the six-week executive program from which the participants of this study graduated. This entails spearheading the logistics of the program, and the recruitment and registration of participants, a role in which I have minimum involvement with the participants, except in rare occasions at a few educational and social gatherings and on graduation day. Considering that participants were not current NLEP program participants, permission was not needed from the University Internal Review Board (IRB) within which the NLEP operates. However, permission was required and requested from the executive director of the program as it pertains to the use of the NLEP graduates’ email contacts.

**Sample Size**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue that sample size in qualitative studies depends not only on the methodology approach, but also on the time commitment that researchers can afford to their study. Thus, as a novice, the researcher considered a total of six participants. This
allowed the researcher enough time to fully engage with each participant to acquire the rich data necessary for the analysis. Once a sufficient number of participants were assembled, a formal invitation was sent to all prospective participants informing them of the purpose and process of the study. A signed consent form, informing them of their rights to privacy and confidentiality, was also attached for them to review before the initial interview.

**Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Qualitative studies require first-person account of their experiences. Semi-structured in-depth interview is one tool that affords participants such leeway with its open-ended questions and conversational style and the length of the interview, which could last for an hour or more. Consequently, the researcher used semi-structured in-depth interviews as the main data collection procedure in this General Qualitative study. As a novice, the researcher also prepared a schedule of 10 to 15 main questions with allowance for clarification questions added as needed. One semi-structured interview, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, was conducted. Participants were given the opportunity to choose a site that was comfortable for them. Since the participants were unavailable for a face-to-face interview, Skype and telephone interviews were conducted. A speaker was used to allow recording when using phone and Skype.

Researcher used 5 to 10 minutes at the start of each interview to review the consent form that was previously emailed to the prospective participants and returned to the researcher with their signature. At that time, participants were informed of their right to privacy and the right to withdraw at any time, a practice that continued throughout the interview process. All interviews, telephone and skype, were audio recorded, and participants were asked for and granted permission before and during the interview, as required by the IRB. To help the researcher in
making sure that a back-up copy was available, two digital voice recorders were used at time of interviews.

**Reflective memos.** As soon as participants were informed of the goal of the study, they were also asked to reflect on their experiences. During interviews, the researcher kept a journal to report behaviors and signs that could not be detected from transcription. At the end of each interview, the researcher also recorded her thoughts and feelings about the interviews in the same journal.

**Document analysis.** Participants were also asked for permission to use their initial application and essay in the analysis of the study. Butin (2010) emphasizes the use of document analysis as a good source of data in qualitative studies. As such, document analysis was also used in this study. The rationale for this was that the NLEP application included demographic information, and the essay describing their goals for their union and/or the labor movement was a crucial part of the research. Although the researcher could have access to participants’ applications and essays, she did not do so until she received permission. Accordingly, participants’ applications and essays, transcribed interviews and the researcher’s journal were all coded and used in the data analysis.

**Data Storage**

To protect the privacy of the participants, a pseudonym was used for each participant, and the interview data, applications and essays did not contain any personal identifiable information as required by the IRB and ethical human protection procedures. Interviews were transcribed by a professional service (Rev.com), and participants were informed of such procedures. All data were kept in a secured area at the researcher’s residence, in a locked file cabinet with the researcher having sole access, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012). All electronic devices
used in this study were also password protected with the researcher having sole access to such
devices and passwords. All materials will be discarded after a period of five years (APA, 2010,
as cited in Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

General Inductive Analysis is a qualitative approach which uses an inductive style of
analysis (Merriam, 2002; Thomas, 2006). As with any other qualitative approaches, its focus is
on the analysis of the meaning making from the participant and the ability of the researcher to
interpret the data. According to Thomas (2006), most qualitative studies follow the same process
of condensing raw data to arrive at a minimal number of categories and a rich description of the
final product, which for a phenomenology study is a description of the essence of the experience
compared to the GIA, which is simply a rich description of the experience.

The process is that emergent themes or categories are identified from the reading and re-
reading of raw data or transcripts, which are then coded using specific words or chunks of words
from the data or other meaningful words ascribed by the researcher based on his/her
interpretation of the data. Coding is defined as a method to organize similar data into
meaningful units or categories of common characteristics (Saldaña, 2013) to build these themes
or patterns. At the end, paying attention to differences and similarities between participants’
transcripts is also advised to arrive at the final rich descriptive analysis that is required for a
qualitative approach.

Thomas (2006) and Saldaña (2013) suggest manual coding for qualitative study using
inductive style analysis and for novice researchers. As a novice, the researcher used manual
coding and followed Saldaña’s (2013) two-step cycles. The first cycle involves breaking down
raw data into subcategories using different coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). In this particular
study, the researcher used both descriptive and in Vivo codes. Descriptive coding entails summarizing or interpreting the data to relate the message and is a great choice for studies using many forms of data such as interviews, and journals, to name a few (Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo coding entails using the interviewee’s own words, and as such is appropriate for “studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). The second cycle entails analyzing and classifying the results of the first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). In this cycle, the researcher used pattern coding to develop categories based on the relevance and frequency of the previously coded data (Saldaña, 2013).

Using these procedures, the researcher read and re-read each participant’s documents and transcripts, making notes on the margins until she could fully grasp the experience as well as the meaning-making of the first participant before moving to the next participant’s transcript. During this process, Smith et al. (2009) recommend that the researcher read the transcript while listening to the audiotape. This allows the researcher to envision the participant answering the questions, a process that the researcher followed. In reference to the coding process, Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest:

You can start the coding with concepts and themes that you explicitly asked about. Then you can look for concepts and explanations that your interviewees emphasize. You can examine your notable quote files and see what concepts and themes they evoke. If some of your research is based on published literature, you might want to see which concepts and themes emphasized in that literature appear in your interviews and code them as well. Finally, the themes and concepts you work out may in turn suggest others that are closely related. (p. 94)
Following that procedure, the researcher used provisional coding as a third round method. For instance, participants were asked about their situation upon their return to work. This created a theme which elaborated on the difficulty and ease of transitioning back to the workplace after such a long training. The researcher also used concepts and themes from the literature. The researcher then developed a group of significant statements and grouped them into themes to identify commonalities and differences in pattern within the first document and transcript. The researcher then moved to the next document and transcript to follow the same procedure. She then compared the documents and transcripts for each participant to identify similarities and differences among them. As the final product or narrative needed to be descriptive, the researcher presented the findings of this study in a descriptive form using the participants’ viewpoint and experience and using their own words, at time, to give them a voice (Smith et al., 2009).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is described as a strategy that researchers use to document accuracy of their study (Creswell, 2013). The word validation is also used to describe such process, and it is recommended that qualitative researchers use at least two validation strategies to determine the trustworthiness of a study (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative study of the post-educational experiences of the graduates of the Northeast Labor Executive Program, the researcher’s bias was explicitly clarified (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation, which entails collecting data from diverse sources, was also used (Creswell, 2013).

While these strategies mentioned above are more than sufficient for any qualitative study, Yardley’s (2000) approach, which requires researcher and study to show sensitivity to context,
commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance (as cited in Smith et al., 2009), was also followed for this GIA study.

**Sensitivity to Context**

According to Yardley’s (2000) principles, a good qualitative study should demonstrate sensitivity to the context, and this entails elaborating on the rationale for choosing a specific methodology for the study, elaborating on the choice and sampling of participants for the study, and showing dedication and appreciation in collection of the data (Smith et al., 2009). All the requirements have been fulfilled and described earlier. Use of a theory and literature on the topic are also recommended, and the researcher made sure that the study was grounded in a theoretical framework and that extensive literature was used to guide and substantiate the discussions and findings as suggested by Yardley’s principles (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher also showed sensitivity to context in the data analysis by making sure that the voice of each participant was heard, through not only the researcher’s interpretations, but also by using as many verbatim extracts as possible to support the claims (Smith et al., 2009).

**Commitment and Rigor**

According to Yardley’s principles, a qualitative study requires personal commitment from the researcher, and participants need to feel at ease to allow researcher the possibility to access the information needed (Smith et al., 2009). This can enhance the thoroughness or rigor of the study. One way this could be accomplished is by making sure that participants selected for the study are homogeneous, information collected from in-depth interviews are rich in details, and that the analysis is much more than a description of the experience but an interpretation of the experience (Smith et al., 2009). These requirements were followed by the researcher and were described earlier in this chapter of the study.
Transparency and Coherence

Yardley’s principle requires that the stages of the research process are described in the study from the selection of participants, through interview process and analysis (Smith et al., 2009). In other words, the study needs to be transparent and the final product should show coherence by being consistent with the chosen method (Smith et al., 2009). The selection of the participants and the interview process has been described in detail in this chapter. In regards to the analysis, the researcher first described personal experiences before directing full attention to the participants in the study following the suggestion of Smith et al. (2009) of bracketing oneself in a qualitative study. Then, a group of significant statements was developed and grouped into themes or categories for further analysis, finally, write the study was written by not only interpreting the meaning of the participants’ experience, but by also giving them a voice, using their own words as much as possible (Smith et al., 2009).

Impact and Importance

Yardley’s principle also requires that researcher highlights the importance of the study as well as its impact, and this could be accomplished by making sure that reader learned “something important, interesting or useful” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 183). The importance of the study was highlighted in the first chapter of the study. The hope is that the learning acquired from this study will help the program be better equipped to assist labor leaders in their constant struggle in advocating for working people.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protecting the rights and privacy of research participants is highly important when conducting a research study. There were no threats or harm associated with participation in this study. Moreover, no members of protected groups participated in this study. All participants
were over the age of 18, and the researcher made sure that the following steps were followed to
protect the rights and privacy of participants. First, the researcher requested permission from the
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). In such request, the researcher fully
disclosed the purpose and process of the study. The researcher also requested permission to
contact graduates of the 2015 and 2016 session of the Northeast Labor Executive Program.
Moreover, an initial invitation, describing the purpose of the study, time commitment that was
needed to participate in the study, risk associated with the study, and the willingness and
diligence of the researcher to minimize or eliminate the risk, was sent to graduates of the 2015
and 2016 sessions of the Northeast Labor Executive Program. These prospective participants
were also made aware that they were not obligated to participate in the study, and even after
agreeing to participate, they were informed that they were free to withdraw at any time
(Creswell, 2013). The invitation also addressed the issue of confidentiality to assure prospective
participants that any information provided to the researcher would be kept in the utmost
confidential place.

Upon acceptance, and prior to the interview, an unsigned consent form, restating
participants’ rights to privacy and confidentiality and the researcher’s obligation to follow such
protocol, was sent to the participants for their review and signature. At the time of interview, the
consent form, which was signed and returned to the researcher, was reviewed. Participants were
asked to acknowledge that they were of sound mind, that they had read and understood their
rights to privacy, and confidentiality, and that they were not coerced. They were also informed
of their rights to withdraw at any time.
Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the post-educational experience of the graduates of an executive program for labor leaders as it relates to their responsibility to transfer what they have learned to their respective union or to the labor movement. A focus of this inquiry was to determine how participants find meaning in their educational experiences, or what some social scientists call meaning making which is the act of making sense of one’s life and learning process (Wlodkowski, 2008). To keep align with the chosen methodology, the conceptual framework and the goal of the study, the following question was formulated: How do graduates of an executive program for labor leaders make sense of their post-educational experience as it relates to the transfer of learning from the program to the workplace?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes the participants in the study. These descriptions are presented in the order of the interviews using pseudonyms that the researcher chose for each participant. The second part of the chapter reports the findings and the supporting data from the interviews and other documents focusing mostly on participants’ perspective on their sense of responsibility to transfer the newly acquired learning. The third section elaborates on the different recommendations presented by the participants.

Profiles of Participants

An email detailing the purpose of this study was sent to the graduates of the 2015 and 2016 sessions of the NLEP, which together had a total of 85 participants. Three graduates from each session participated in this study. As seen on Table 1 and the participants’ biographical information, participants belong to diverse unions from the U.S., Canada and Australia. While these graduates were the only ones available to participate in this study, they still provided the
opportunity for a coherent mixture of gender, age range, position and years of experience in the labor movement, which were the criteria for selection from the start.

Table 1

**Participants’ Biographical Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Union Type</th>
<th>Positions Roles</th>
<th>Years in Labor</th>
<th>NLEP Session</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smiley</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>President of Union Local Service Rep. VP/State Union</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Master in Public Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilmore</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>Director of Labor fund</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>BS in History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girgan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>International Representative</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Some College Course Work in Law and Labor Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wally</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Master in Industrial Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>BA in Labor Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Canadian Federation</td>
<td>Director of Development-Organizer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>College Course Labor Studies/ Certificate in Human Resource Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Smiley**

Smiley, a Caucasian American male, was 34 years old when he attended the program in 2015 and has been working in the union for the past 13 years. His union, an international union, so called because it has affiliates in Canada, represents public sector employees and benefits from 90 percent union membership density due to the fact that employees in his field of work are required to join the union as part of employment, a process referred to as closed shop.
When asked how and why he got involved in the union, Smiley mentions that he “started campaigning with his grandfather at the age of six”. The idea, he points out, was that “people were less likely to close the door on somebody with a child”. Smiley argues that being in a unionized field of work, his participation was inevitable; however, his devotion and dedication came from growing up in the union. As a result of such devotion, his emergence in the union leadership evolved at a fast pace. While he did not mention having a mentor per se, Smiley acknowledges that he was, in a way, guided by his predecessor with whom he ran for election on a double ticket, he for the vice president and his predecessor for the president. A few years later, when the president stepped down to go back to school for his master’s degree, he mentions that he was able to acquire that position.

Smiley is currently the president of his local, an elected position that, he mentions, was a natural progression and something that he “yearned to do”. He is also the vice president of the state union and a service representative for the international union. He reveals that all three of these positions are blended together allowing him some autonomy at time. Before joining the union, Smiley worked in U.S. presidential campaigns, a skill set that, he asserts, helps him better accomplish his duty of advocating for the less fortunate as he makes use of it to place union advocates in positions of leadership in the government.

While his field of work does not require higher education credentials, Smiley holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master’s degree in Public Administration. While it has been his dream to attend the program, he mentions that it took him six years to finally apply to the program as he wanted to have a substantial record of accomplishments to demonstrate how the investment would benefit the organization now and in the future. Smiley found that the application process in his union was very competitive as the problems facing the labor movement and “word of
mouth” from previous participants had greatly increased the number of applicants. Being the first in his geographic area to attend the program, he avows that he was very excited when he learned that he was chosen and managed to acquire release time to freely focus on his study.

**Gilmore**

Gilmore is also a Caucasian American male. He was 35 years old when he attended the program in 2015. He has been working in the union for the previous 15 years. His union also has affiliates in Canada. Though in the private sector, Gilmore’s union also benefits from high union density because of the way they operate. As a craft union, they are in charge of placing their employees with contractors, which means that to be employed, one has to become a union member.

Gilmore also grew up in a unionized family with his mom and dad being involved in the union. While this was not an indication that he should be working in the union, as he jokingly admits, he shares that he still found himself wandering back to the union life, dropping out of school on numerous occasions until he finally realized that he needed higher learning to achieve what he wanted in life. After acquiring his degree, he mentions that he went back to the union to advocate for his members, whom, he admits, he saw as family considering that he grew up around them. He comments:

Being around those people and seeing them on that day to day level and seeing just the pride ones, what they've got to go through. They've got families, and they've got responsibilities, and seeing all that, gives you, I think, a greater ... At least for me, gave me a greater sense that there was more to being a union member than just paying your dues every month. There's a responsibility there.
This type of devotion got him more and more involved in the union, and as hard work always pays off, he found himself being mentored by not just one but two people in his organization leading to his current leadership position, director of the Labor Management Fund. Gilmore also holds an elected position, which he mentions “allows him more freedom” or autonomy. Like Smiley, he has also been very active in political campaigns, a skill set that he also feels help him in his work.

Gilmore holds a Bachelor of Science in History, a degree, he mentions, he acquired after he realized that education was important to get ahead in the workplace and in the union. His search for more knowledge led him to Northeast Labor Executive Program, which, he mentions, came as a surprise to him considering that he only informed his superiors of his intention to attend and was approved to go one month before the program began. Excited about this “once in a lifetime opportunity” as he mentions, he had to rush his application, hoping that it was not too late. At the same time, he argues, being chosen to attend such a prestigious program gave him confidence and confirmed to him that he was on the right track and gave him the motivation that he needed to embark on this new learning venture that could help him effectuate change. It is worth mentioning that both of his bosses are also graduates of the program.

Girgan

Girgan, a Caucasian Canadian male, is also a graduate of the 2015 session of the Northeast Labor Executive Program. He was 48 years old when he attended the program and has been in the labor movement for more than 20 years. Canadian born, he works in one of the Canadian affiliates of a private international union. Girgan is currently an organizer in his union, a position, he mentions that he acquired five years ago. As a fervent democrat, Girgan has also been involved in political campaigns in Canada. While Girgan does not hold a specific degree,
he has, however, been enrolled in higher learning since joining the union, taking courses he believes help him better advocate for his members. He shares, “I never liked learning until I joined the union”. With his devotion to union work and his new found interest in learning, he describes himself as a “lifelong learner” and an “advocate with a cause”.

Girgan asserts that he did not grow up in a union household and “did not have any aspirations for union work”, but his field of work directed him to union life as a union member. And while it took his peers to discover in him the “quality of a good steward”, he acknowledges that it was something that he acquired at a young age, admiring these qualities in his father who was always fighting injustices. He further states:

I've always been, even as far back as my childhood, I remember always wanting to help people. I've just always ... and I've been wanting to stand up for people, so if I see injustices, things just aren't right, I've always been one to speak up, even as a kid, and so I think it was just sort of a natural progression, and I grew up in a home like that.

Reflecting on his progression in the labor movement, he points out that his superiors must have felt the same way as his colleagues did many years ago. And while he was not mentored per se, he admits that he felt grateful to be constantly guided in the right direction by them. In reference to his current position, he tells a story of how he was “hinted five years ago” by his manager who told him to continue to work hard as there could be some great opportunity for him in the near future. While he “took it with a grain of salt”, referring to the suggestion, he mentions that he was amazed when he realized that he was really being considered by his superior for the promotion, which he gladly accepted.

Girgan admits that he had been interested in the program for quite some times. When he was promoted to his current position five years ago, he mentions that he made his superiors
aware that he was interested in attending the program in the future. When they finally gave him the go ahead, he mentions that he felt honored since he had tried many times to convince his superior at his local union to invest in sending him but to no avail. Being a “lifelong learner” and an “advocate with a cause” as he calls himself, he mentions that he was ready to embark on this new learning venture. It can be noted that his superior did not attend the program and that Girgan was the only one in his geographic area to have participated in the program.

**Wally**

Wally is a Caucasian male from Australia. He was 45 years old when he attended the 2016 session of the NLEP. He works for a federal union that serves public service employees in Australia and has been in the union movement for the past 27 years. Wally is currently the secretary of his union, the highest position in the union, which he acquired one year after graduating from the NLEP. Besides having to answer to a board on a few decisions, he mentions that he has full autonomy in his role. While his field of work does not require higher education credentials, Wally holds a Master’s degree in Industrial Relations, a degree, which he acknowledges that he acquired to better advocate for the members.

Wally mentions that he discovered his willingness to fight for people while being subjected to “unfair practices” in the workplace. His arguments were that what he was being subjected to could not be right, and he made sure to get more involved. This necessitated his enrolling in school to learn more about Industrial Relations. When asked about his emergence in leadership positions, he shares:

I came in two stints. As a union leader, I was a delegate first or your equivalent of a shop steward. So, in the initial stages that was that. Then, my involvement sort of catapulted to some extent through being a delegate, which then led to further education in Industrial
Relations. And I studied IR in Australia and Law, and it became a snowball of interest, intellectually as well as from a motivational point of view…That’s the jump out of full time work into full time union work. And very few make that transition. Really, half a dozen or so make that final transition. The majority of our members are passive members, some more active than others. Then, some become activists and become delegates of varying levels, and for me, it was a transition to all those ultimately leading to my position now.

This shows his devotion and determination to arrive at his current position, which, as he so proudly exclaims, is the highest position in his union.

For many years, Australian labor leaders have attended the program in great numbers on scholarship programs from other Australian union organizations or associations. While union membership density is also a concern in Australia, Wally’s union is one of the unions that benefit from high membership density because of closed shop, which requires employees in his field of work to be unionized. While he and another colleague were the first from his union to attend the program, he mentions that the NLEP is being used as a form of leadership succession, which means that he was chosen to attend the program because he was being considered for a promotion to the highest position in his union, which he got after graduating from the program.

While concerned about the sacrifices involved in being away from his young family for such a long period of time, being aware of such promising goals, he reports that he was more than ready to attend the program and to take advantage of all that the program had to offer.

Rose

Rose is a Caucasian, American female who graduated from the class of 2016. She was 59 years old when she attended the program. She has been in the movement for more than 40
years. She works for a private union in the Northeast, which serves both private and public sector employees. Rose mentions that while she did not grow up in a union household, her field of study and type of work were an indication that she was meant to help others. While working in the union was not what she had in mind, she mentions that she knew that union was the way to go when she appeared not to have a voice in regard to her work situation. She moved from passive to active member in the union not only to have a voice, but also to advocate for the less fortunate. When asked about how she arrived at her current position, Rose mentions that she had enjoyed the benefit of a mentor who guided her throughout her progression, and when she suggested that Rose goes back to school to acquire more knowledge on the field of Labor Relations, she followed her suggestions. After acquiring her bachelor’s degree in the field of Labor Studies, she applied and obtained a position in the union.

Rose is currently an organizer in her union. As an organizer her role is to travel to places that need to be unionized and help them reach that goal. Rose also elaborates on the application process in her union. Based on her perception, it was similar to Smiley’s scholarship process with the exception that it was less competitive. She asserts that this kind of leniency allows the union to alternatively choose someone from two existing categories in her geographic area each year, as such building a network of NLEP graduates in her area. Having heard from previous NLEP graduates about their meaningful experiences, she contends that attending the program was also her dream. She comments that while she felt awe when she learned that it was her turn to attend the program, she quickly realized that it was not about her but about the members that she was serving and was ready to embark on this new learning venture.

**Summer**
Summer is an inspiring young Caucasian union leader of Canadian origin. She was 33 years old when she attended the program in 2016 and has been in the labor movement for the past 12 years. Summer’s entrance and progression in the movement was more of an adventure. She mentions that while she was encouraged to become a steward after being subjected to unfair practice, she still was not sure of her direction until she enrolled in a human resource course, which contains a chapter on labor relations or labor studies. She further states, “I had always wanted to be a social worker, growing up, so this sort of fit well within that definition of social justice and helping others, and that sort of thing”.

When asked about her progression in union leadership, Summer explains how the bad behavior of some union leaders had discouraged her from remaining in the first two unions where she had started working as an organizer. Elaborating further on the bad behavior, she reveals how these young organizers were ordered by their leaders to recruit their members from other unions, in order to meet their quotas, a practice referred to as raiding. While this bad experience chased her away from the movement for a few years, her devotion and dedication to helping the voiceless brought her back to work for a federation that has under its umbrella 14 union organizations leading to her current position of leadership. As the director of development, she is in charge of the development and empowerment of women in a male dominated field.

While she does not hold a higher education degree, she has constantly been taking courses in higher education with a focus on Human Resources and Labor Relations, courses that led her to her interest in advocating for the voiceless and to this program. While her organization did not have an established yearly scholarship to send their leaders to the program, as a self-directed learner, she found the program while searching for her next learning venture and was
able to convince her organization to invest in her development. She attests that she was thrilled when she found out that she was accepted and was more than ready to embark on this new learning venture that allowed her to be away from the everyday burden of work “and be amongst like minded individuals”.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the post-educational experiences of the graduates of an executive program for labor leaders. Associated with this purpose was a focus on their sense of responsibility to transfer the newly acquired learning to their respective union and/or the labor movement. Emphasis on their background, and on their path to leadership, helped in understanding their experiences and dedication to the labor movement and provided a foundation for the themes and subthemes which surfaced from the analysis of their interview transcripts, and the NLEP application essay. The participants involved in this study provided rich descriptions of their post-educational experiences. Table 2 provides a pictorial description of these findings from this study, organized according to the themes and their subthemes accordingly.
Table 2

Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Learning Transfer starts with “Me”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I can detect the challenges facing my union and the labor movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I have professional and organizational goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I intend to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. The Program Enhanced or Inhibited my Ability to Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived value of program and its faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived utility of program offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact of networking on transfer of learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. My Workplace as Barriers or Enhancers of the Transfer of Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. Participants’ Perception of their Responsibility to Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I have an obligation to transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I have opportunity to transfer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning Transfer Starts with “Me”**

The first theme that generated from the analysis of this study focuses on the leader’s willingness and purpose to attend the program. As such, “Me” refers to the labor leader who has a goal for herself or himself, his or her union, and the labor movement as a whole and is determined to educate herself or himself by enrolling in a program that provides the platform to acquire the analytical and problem solving skills needed to assist him or her in accomplishing his or her goals. The data excerpted from their NLEP application essay, in which they described
their willingness and ability to learn and intention to transfer the newly acquired learning can be seen as the initiation of the learning transfer. This theme is divided into four subthemes: (a) I can detect the challenges facing my union and the labor movement; (b) I have professional and organizational goals, (c) I intend to learn, (d) I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace. Below is a pictorial of the four subthemes with participants’ statements on how the problem facing their union or the labor movement triggers intention to learn and to transfer. The data from Table 3 are excerpted from participants’ NLEP application essay, which was necessary to participate in the Northeast Labor Executive Program.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smiley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I can detect challenges facing my union and the labor movement:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negative public perception is one of the toughest obstacles that the contemporary labor movement must work to overcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have professional and organizational goals:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acquisition of Negotiation Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acquisition of Strategic Planning Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn more effectively about creative, out-of-the-box solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I intend to learn - I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My personal interest in attending the program is to learn more effectively how to bring creative, out-of-the-box solutions to issues facing the labor movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum covered in the program such as strategic planning, leadership, arbitration and labor history will synthesize my existing knowledge with that of subject-matter experts and will serve me in my current and future endeavors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The content covered in this course is what will develop me as an individual as much as a labor leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I look forward to the opportunity to provide a tremendous and honorable return on the investment of enrollment in the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gilmore

**I can detect challenges facing my union and labor movement:**
- We have lost our ways in some respects.
- We must look to organize workers if we are to succeed.
- We have lost sight of the overall reason for our existence, to represent workers.
- We espouse much but act far too little.

**I have professional and organizational goals:**
- Lead our local unions to grow
- To empower members
- To enact social change
- To make a difference for all workers

**I intend to learn - I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace:**
- I feel my further development and growth as a union leader is dependent upon, not just attending, but in embracing and putting in action all that this program has to offer.
- I believe it offers an excellent opportunity to learn new skills, refine abilities that I already possess, and unlock talents that I did not know I owned.
- My greatest hope is, to one day be in a position to help push reforms within my union.

Girgan

**I can detect the challenges facing union and/or the labor movement:**
- Revitalization of my union

**I have professional and organizational goals:**
- Become the absolute best representative
- Organize the unorganized
- Contribute to the revitalization of my union

**I intend to learn - I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace:**
- I am personally driven in attaining my best potential through this program.
- Our department is becoming more strategic in organizing, in lobbying government for legislated improvements and we ought to strive to doing so in a professionally well trained manner.
- I have much to contribute through my passion, activism and determination.
- I believe there is much opportunity. We just need the execution, support and hard work to achieve this.
- I have many more years left to give this great movement that we call the labor movement. And I want to make the biggest impact possible for our department, our members and the organization.
- I believe that if you select me as worthy student for this program, I will gain some extraordinary training, education and confidence in helping me achieve my goals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Wally</strong></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I can detect the challenges facing my union and/or the labor movement:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is a need for us to be ahead of the curb and to look at different ways of politically campaigning in a way that doesn't allow our tactics to be neutralized by employers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have professional and organizational goals:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organizing Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Negotiation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strategic Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I intend to learn - I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The ability to discuss industrial relations trends with senior leaders from other countries will help me identify and develop successful union strategies that might assist my union maintain member conditions despite much employer-initiated change that has been forecasted for the future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exposure to the experiences of other unions in term of organizing strategy, negotiation and strategic planning would help diversify and develop my skills to keep pace with workplace bargaining trends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improving capacity to assess and challenge the way practices have evolved locally</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rose</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I can detect the challenges facing my union and/or the labor movement:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rapidly changing environment is impacting our unions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have professional and organizational goals:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organizing strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strategic planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I intend to learn - I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- As the world environment changes politically and economically, I would like to gain experience and knowledge on how I can best utilize my role as an organizer to help our current members and potential new members address the changing work environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- My hope is to learn more about strategic planning to prepare for the rapidly changing environment that is impacting our unions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attending the Northeast Labor Executive Program will allow me to bring new insight to my work for the organization and to better assist others who seek a voice in their workplaces and their advocacy as professionals.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I can detect the challenges facing my union and/or the labor movement:
- Member engagement is vital for the future success of unions.
- Looking inward at some of the barriers and systemic problems within our house are crucial to collective and organized participants.
- Now more than ever labor has to be open to change.

I have professional and organizational goals:
- I wish to contribute to that change by being innovative, collaborative, and strategic in my work.

I intend to learn - I intend to transfer the learning in the workplace:
- The Northeast Labor Executive Program has the potential to impact my career in a profound and meaningful way. Some of my best work is the direct result of exchanging ideas and perspectives with others.
- In being selected for this program, I would have the opportunity to develop relationships with an experienced group of like-minded professionals who could have a tremendous influence on my career as a union leader.
- I would also have the opportunity to learn from experienced faculty on a wide range of topics that could broaden and further develop my skills and abilities as a labor leader.

The data in the above depictions show that participants placed a big emphasis on education and learning. This is due to the fact that education is another way that people move to leadership positions in the union, and the Northeast Labor Executive Program provides that platform, no matter the leader’s level of education. With union organizations changing their hiring practices, seeking to recruit and retain people with credentials, labor leaders are focusing more on education to maintain and potentially increase their momentum. Smiley argues “I think everyone has a responsibility, especially if they are a union leaders or an advocate, to increase their knowledge base”. Summer mentions “I am always looking to improve, or to upgrade my education and do different things, and like continue improving myself and learning”. Rose’s mentor suggested that she goes back to school, so she could be more involved in the union, and she did. When asked about his worst experience in the union, Girgan states:

I think what you see a lot in the labor movement, particularly in the private sector, is you have a lot of untrained, uneducated, blue collar type of individuals who came up the
ranks like me, who just don’t have the skill set to deal with certain matters in business like sense. And when someone comes with natural skills or is younger and has natural ability not like they’re…I wasn’t educated, but I had a little more ability I think. My older superior took it as a threat.

While this may be a current occurrence as Girgan states, for others it is completely different, so much so that furthering their education is expected of them. Gilmore mentions, “The best experience I’ve had is getting the opportunity to go to the Northeast Labor Executive Program”, an opportunity that was afforded to him by his union. This opportunity, when afforded, is being used for leadership development with a focus on personal, professional and/or organizational goals, making it a platform for leadership succession for most union organizations. As such, the expectation is that they should apply themselves and bring the learning back to the organization.

**The Program Enhanced or Inhibited my Ability to Transfer**

The second theme generated from the data focuses on how participants see the impact of the educational experience on transfer of learning. Participants described their feelings and emotions about being part of the program. While most participants expected the program to be about leadership development, they mention that they were “elated” to realize that it was much more than that. They all expressed their satisfaction especially as it relates to the caliber of the faculty, the course content and the teaching strategies used in the delivery of the program. From the data, it was evident that being part of such an historic and prestigious program gave participants the motivation that they needed to learn, which, in turns, gave them the confidence they needed to transfer the learning. This theme is divided into three subthemes. The first subtheme elaborates on the emotions that generated from being part of the program itself. The
second subtheme elaborates on the faculty and the program learning activities and their impact on transfer. The third subtheme elaborates on the opportunity of networking that generated from being part of the learning process and its impact on the transfer of learning. Following are the subthemes: (a) perceived value of program and its faculty, (b) perceived utility of program offerings, (c) impact of networking on transfer of learning.

**Perceived value of program and its faculty.** Value refers to the importance people give to self, other individuals or places they had the privilege to cross path with, and Northeast University is one of these places that people hold in high value. Every time someone hears the name Northeast University as one of the institutions that one is affiliated to, it brings some kind of emotion that cannot be explained, and all the participants acknowledge having that emotion when they realized that this goal was within reach for them due to their union affiliation. For most of the participants, it did not matter how they got there and for what purpose. For all of them, this was a “dream come true”, and their goal was to make the experience as meaningful as possible. Feelings of “excitement”, “joy”, “pride”, and words such as “happy”, and “elated” were common among the participants. Some were more exclusive than others in their expression of joy and the value added that comes with being part of such an historic and valuable experience, which, as most mentioned, influenced their motivation to learn. Rose blissfully shares:

I remember the first day, walked into the campus thinking; wow this is … University! And I was thinking; boy! wouldn't my mother and father be proud that I was actually attending a course there. And I just think it was … for at least a lot of people, the opportunity even to take a class there, is beyond their reach. So I think for me … and
knowing how prestigious this course was, to have been chosen to go ...I think was probably the high-point.

The emotion was as exhilarating for Smiley who expresses it as follow:

Sometimes, I would sit in every seat that I could because I always wondered if this is one of the seats that Obama sat in... It's .... It carries with it ... It’s got its own culture, It’s got its own ethos, It’s got its own heartbeat, and it has its own aura. It was someplace I never expected to be. I just found it awe inspiring. It was truly the definition of the word awesome, and I think it made it more valued and appreciated.

Wally also expresses his emotion and explains how his motivation stemmed from being part of such a historic place. He further states:

There's a sense of esteem about the place and so, there's a sense of personal satisfaction and reward about walking through that place let alone ... It's not your everyday training course. There's a sense of history on the program too that I came to discover only once I got there about how long it had been running, and there's an essence of being part of something there that is quite, not only historic but transcends. I think a lot of generations, and I think that is quite powerful too, in terms of how it translates; personally, into the way I approached the program and my commitment to the program, which was very strong to be honest.

There was also feeling of apprehension caused by expectations of change that should happen upon return from the learning. Gilmore presents these feelings as follow:

It was very exciting, and it was a confidence booster, but also a little shock to the system about wow, there's more expectations here now. That changes. At least for me, the change in expectations also means there are changes in different things, and how you got
to conduct yourself just when you're out and when you're at these events, and what you have to do, and who you have to see…that realization that you've got to do more. You can't just keep doing the same old thing. The role has changed. The expectations have changed, and so obviously the behavior and how you do things has to change.

It seems like Girgan experienced the same feelings and also presents his view as a kind of responsibility that this gesture entailed. He mentions:

I felt that it was, in many respects, a calling. It's a privilege to serve people and to try to make a difference in the lives of working families and there's… It's a huge responsibility. And when you're afforded the opportunity to get the training and the exposure that we received at an institution such as Northeast, I think if you don't deem that a responsibility, there's something wrong with you.

At the same time, Summer was as excited as everyone else, and saw the opportunity as a way to refocus and take care of the self. She shares:

It was so great to be able to take a step away from your work and just ... just think and dream and, you know, really, like, reinvest in why you're doing this work, and also, just reflect on the energy that you're putting in, and make sure that you take care of yourself, and that sort of thing. So, it was really good to just be able to step away and be amongst like-minded individuals.

These types of emotions are common in learning situations especially for adult learners, who often bring their whole self in to a learning process. As Wlodkowski (2008) argues, emotions, especially those that lead learners to a state of being in flow such as happiness, joy and so on, activate intrinsic motivation in adults leading to a more satisfying or significant learning experience.
At the same time, it was clear from the data that the participants were all impressed by the caliber of the faculty, and they expressed their appreciation, again some more vocal and inspired than others. Referring to a very high profile faculty of the NLEP, Smiley declares:

He's the man! The way that he Socratically gets around an issue, to intelligently break it down in a layman style term, to ensure that his point is most well received... I have never seen his points not be well received on the path of social gain. It is amazing to me...that mind is something…getting as old as he is. Because we don't have too many of them out there, but to meet him was like just watching art in human form.

Wally expresses the same feeling about another instructor when he enthusiastically shares:

I remember the doctor. He's really different. For an Australian, particularly, to watch someone present like that, it's almost comedic for us. And look, he engaged me from the very start. But the crux of what he was saying, I found really interesting because that was about me. And I think a lot of what we do as union leaders is about how we carry ourselves. It's bluff. It's strategy. It's positioning. It’s knowing your own limits. And, I did find that really, really, really useful and intriguing. I mean, I must admit, I spent hours pondering over that assessment that he gave because it was very much about me and how ready are you. How ready are you to take on leadership positions. So, really do your own self-assessment. That was really intriguing. That was really useful.

Girgan Shares:

The opportunity was without question, going in, an absolute privilege and an honor to be able to go to an institution like Northeast, even though we weren't going there to get a degree or anything like that…. I mean, what an honor and privilege that was! All these things, there was, I forget his name, he spoke the last day we were there, the reverend
who was part of the civil rights movement with Dr. King. He spoke to us, and it was absolutely riveting. And this man was, I think, in his mid 80s, and he spoke like he was 25 and sharp as a tack, and it was just ... I felt blessed. Wow.

While most of the participants did not specifically state that such experiences enhanced the transfer of learning, it could be inferred that it could have an effect on transfer of learning. May it be for “bragging rights”, as most felt that it was an honor, or for the mere fact that they did learn something valuable from the best in the field and wanted to share it with others?

**Perceived utility of program offerings.** Reflecting on the relevance of the program content to the accomplishment of their goals, words like “instrumental”, “intriguing”, and “fascinating” were used. Statements like “I think I can take something from all of them.”, “This course spoke to my goals.”, “They all had an impact on what I do.”, and “I valued all of them.” were also common among their reflections. Participants found courses that were relatable, which focused on bringing practical solutions to their everyday challenges, very motivating. They also felt that the program gave them the opportunity to learn new things and the opportunity to enhance old skills and knowledge. Smiley shares:

I couldn't have really expected what the program was before I came. I thought it was going to be, to tell you the truth, I thought it was going to be a little bit more leadership development. There was some of that, but it was ... what I took from it and in the end, a great understanding of pointed macro issues across the labor movement and across North America. It was not only America, but there was a lot of Canadian influence. There was influence from across the world obviously, but I was unsure, and I was expecting a lot of leadership development, which to tell you the truth, when you pay attention and you
understand, that only strengthens your skill set as a leader because you can come back more knowledgeable, more well read, more understanding and talk intelligently on issues.

The feeling was mutual for Rose who states:

Well, I think I learned a lot on a lot of subjects. And some would be more beneficial for me in reaching those goals and some not so much, but they all still have an impact on what I do. I may not be involved in every aspect of the organization here, but I certainly know what's going on.... And some subjects are more important than others.

Wally asserts:

I think what I had, was pieces of each that I found really engaging at times, sections that I just went, wow that's good. Little snippets, and those were bits that I felt that delivered often an edge where I went, that gives me the edge that gives me a tool, a practical way that, how I carry myself, do something. There's no book that teaches you how to be a senior union leader, and you often just learn from watching the star of others, and so, little bits like that.

Gilmore expresses his satisfaction and motivation to learn and transfer the knowledge as follows:

Yeah. The leadership development was my favorite portion…. I enjoyed the case studies, those were great. Talking about.... You don't think about it, at least I didn't. I never thought... the differences in managing and leading. That there are huge differences in being a manager, being a leader, and not thinking about what those things actually mean. They're just words until somebody really talks about.... There are differences in how these things go. You can be a really good manager and be a terrible leader. You can be a great leader and be a terrible manager. The key is to be good at both, and how do you do that? That, to me, talking about how you get there, doing that part of that leadership and
development, is thinking strategically and strategic planning. All those things fitting together like that were for me my favorite part of all. It just crystallized, at least for me anyway. It crystallized in my mind about okay, there's more to this than just checking all the boxes about oh yeah, we did this, we did.... You've got to inspire people, you've got to.... There's just so much more to do in all of it, and getting comfortable and accepting that responsibility.

Girgan talks about the confidence that he gained from his participation. He shares:

Just having more confidence has also been a big benefit. You know, learning simple things like historical perspective and the geopolitical perspective of you know, what has occurred in American history, what shaped the labor movement over the last century. All those things, they have contributed to giving me more confidence and just knowing where we came from and where we're going.

Amazingly, while Girgan who is a foreign participant found the American History course to be inspiring, both Wally and Summer, who are also foreign participants, convey that they had trouble staying motivated in that course. While they both acknowledged having acquired some valuable knowledge at the end, they felt that it did not speak to them as much as courses that were related to their goals. Summer also acknowledges not enjoying another course due to the organizing tactics presented. Her argument is that all unions are not the same, and while some organizing tactics might be acceptable for some, they might not be acceptable for others, especially for the ones which need to be friendly with the employers to keep their business alive. Her argument was echoed by both Gilmore and Girgan whose unions need to cooperate with employers to remain in existence or to flourish. Summer also felt that the reading was quite intense, and all she could do during the program was to skim through them. This led to a
suggestion provided by Wally who felt that not everyone was as engaged as he was due to the lack of reading preparation. He explains the hours that he had to spend reading and the strategies he used to make sure that he came to class “intellectually engaged”. While he felt that his strategies helped him get the best out of the program due to his intellectual stamina, he felt that not everyone was as dedicated as he was. His suggestion is to provide the reading materials ahead of time, so participants can also come to class prepared. Sharing his frustration he advances:

I actually have a vested interest in making sure that all the participants, not just that I can read it, but that they could read it. Because if they're not reading it, the professional development comes out of the engagement with the other people is reduced. And it was a bit frustrating for me when I looked to my left or looked to my right and going ‘these people haven't read this stuff’. How can I really engage with them in a conversation about what they think when they haven't really read it.

With regard to strategies used in the delivery of the course content, most of the participants found that courses that were interactive and included team work and the use of case method were valuable in helping them achieve their goals. They also mention that these courses were effective in helping them not only in retaining the materials, but also in transferring the strategy to their own work situations. Girgan shares:

Getting a greater respect for group involvement is also a big takeaway for me. When you don't utilize everybody and keep people informed, it works against you. And so, that was one of the big takeaways I got from Northeast, was how to work with people, how to use diplomacy to work with people.
The course content along with strategies used in the program should in a way foster transfer of learning, and most of the participants acknowledge having learned something of value that gave them the confidence they needed to transfer.

**Impact of networking on transfer of learning.** Participants in this study found that the new relations that they made with classmates and faculty to be beneficial to transfer of learning. Smiley mentions having been able to help a fellow classmate with a problem he was facing at work made him reflect on the learning. He reports:

> Just as important is the times spent out of class. I have relied upon the relationships and the friendships that were made there at that program, for not only professional, but personal development. I would call and say, hey have you had this sort of occurrence in the past and what did you do about it. And I've gotten similar calls as well.

Girgan explains how a group of his classmates was able to help him solve some issues that he was facing at work. This connection is even more important for him as he mentions:

> Like whenever I have a problem, I don't ... you know I don't work in an office anymore. I don't have supportive coworkers close by, so when I'm really struggling with issues, and sometimes it's internal politics, who do you talk to? Well, I've got a whole bunch of friends from Northeast that I talk with, and they've been able to assist me in a number of areas. So, that's very positive.

While Summer feels that the networking opportunity helped her in her transfer endeavors after leaving the program, being a young leader surrounded by older leaders as classmates, she mentions that it would have been a great idea to establish a formal mentoring program from the start of the program, someone that she could contact when in need. She indicates:
Because, you know, there's a younger generation, and doing things that maybe they want some advice from ... and even a couple times I was like, "Oh, I would love to just call up with this problem". But I don't ... You know. You don't know the protocols. And to be someone's mentor, you have to agree to it, too, and ... because it is, it can be time-consuming, sometimes. I mean, not all the time, but I think it would be nice to have that link. I haven't gone down that road. I'm not sure if anybody really has. So, it would be cool to set up sort of formal mentorship.

While her suggestion could be fruitful for all, as mentoring usually benefits both parties, there is a possibility that not everyone would seek or agree to this type of mentoring during or after the program. However, considering that all the participants in this study acknowledge having taken advantage of the networking opportunities to achieve their goals, the mentoring program could also be productive.

**My Workplace as Enhancer or Barrier to Transfer**

The third theme generated from the analysis of the data refers to the perception of the participants as they move from the learning site to the workplace. While participants acknowledge that they were warned in the last few days of classes about their work climate as it relates to support or retraction from peers and/or management and for doing things too fast, they found barriers that they needed to overcome. Work climate refers to the culture of an organization as it relates to the acceptance to support or not support the transfer of learning or to give colleagues or staff the opportunity to freely transfer new learning. While participants were, at the end, able to transfer the knowledge, most acknowledge that it was at time difficult and exciting. When asked about the transition process as he returned to work, Smiley explains:
You have to come back and slow down. You have all these ideas, but you have to pace yourself. If you don't slow down, others aren't on the same heartbeat. They're not as jazzed up, your boards, your staff around you. So, you got to slow yourself, and you also have to continue to speak the language that a … grad is speaking. You can't be talking... come back with all this, and you got to turn it into small, tangible voice for everybody else around.

While Summer was eager to share her newly acquired learning with others, she felt that time did not allow her such luxury. She reports:

For me, it was really difficult because I had come from really thinking about my objectives. And I think that's what was so beautiful about that class. And then, when you come back to work, you have to focus again on the small details of everyday…everyday tasks. And you’re like, but no, I want to change the world. I don’t want to answer this email. So, it’s hard to transition from, you know, thinking big picture to doing the mundane daily things and getting caught back up doing that again.

While both Smiley and Summer were struggling within themselves to finally share the knowledge with others or just start using the newly acquired knowledge or skills, one because of his high position in his union and the other because of her mundane tasks that required her immediate attention, others had to deal with colleagues’ good and/or bad behavior. Gilmore mentions that he was victim of the “broom syndrome”, which he describes as the resentment and barriers from others when one attempts to apply the newly acquired learning too fast. Gilmore talks about all the resistance that he encountered as he tried to incorporate some of the learning into his work. He declares:
There's a hint of jealousy in some people because you got to go and they didn't.... Trying to figure out ways to take the knowledge and take the information and work it into what we're already doing, and at the same time leading other people and bringing them along into maybe a new way of thinking, was one of the things that took a little bit of time. And I think we're still working at it, trying to move people in and do different things.

That was the hardest part, at least for me. You got all this information. You're jazzed up. You're fired up. It's all fresh. You've been with at least 30 people who've got the same ideas about where we want to go, and we're excited. Trade union! And, let's go! And go! Fight! Win! Then you come home, and not everybody's there. It's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, slow down, and hold on. That was hard. Trying to reconcile all that and then still move forward. I think that was the hardest part for me… is getting beyond that initial pushback.

The reaction at the workplace was the same for Girgan, who shares:

Well, I tried to do too much too fast. So, I tried to show where we're doing things incorrectly. They were the old way. They were stale, you know. We need to do things a little more differently, you know. We talked a lot about the grass roots organizing involving the membership, getting more involved with the rank and file, taking less away from our officers or getting them to incorporate the rank and file more. And I had met nothing but resistance when I tried to get some buy in this area. And it's only in recent months to the last year that I am getting buy in, but still there's a lot of resistance from you know, people that are in their 60s…and they're scared that if they train activists, and they encourage activism, someone's going to come along that's better than them and they're going to lose their job.
At the same time, expectations and excitement from peers motivated others to transfer the learning at a faster pace. Wally shares:

I think we were the first two to return to Melbourne from having done the program in Victoria. So, there was a sense of interest around the office. I think a sense of expectation about what is it that these guys have brought. I think people listened a bit more; were interested a bit more. Every time they heard something that you related back to that experience, I think they did prick up a bit, so that was interesting.

The reaction at the workplace was similar for Rose, who shares:

Well, I think a lot of people were congratulatory, and I think it was an opportunity for me to talk about a number of things that I'd learned. In fact, I did do that with a group of my co-workers. And just went over some of the things you know, I can't remember all of them but, just on a basic level. And then in individual groups or individually, I've talked more with people about different subjects. A lot more about what I've learned about the unions and other unions, and how they do things, you know to my colleagues in the program.

It was evident in the data that participants who were able to seamlessly transition had some type of established procedures in the workplace due to the fact that others have either participated in the program or have the idea that one day will be their turn. This is due in part to the leniency of the scholarship selection process, in Rose’s case for example, and from the mere fact that the NLEP is use as a form of promotion in Wally’s union, a process that was emphasized on their profile. The learning culture was so welcoming in Rose’s workplace that she was able to invite one of the faculties to present at a workshop that she was organizing right after participating in the program, a tactic that she sees as an enhancer to transfer of learning. At
the same time, while the transition process was not too difficult for Smiley, as he is the one in charge in his area, with the scholarship selection process being so competitive in his union, the likelihood of having someone in his department attend the program was quite minimal. Acknowledging the importance of having someone in close proximity with these skills, he requested that one of the faculty provide one of the trainings to some of his staff. He also plans to raise funds to send someone from his geographic area to the NLEP, a tactic that he thinks could help in the transfer of learning.

**Participants’ Sense of Responsibility to Transfer the Learning**

The fourth theme generated from the analysis of the data focuses on participants’ sense of responsibility to transfer the newly acquired learning. This theme elaborates on participants’ perception of their obligation to transfer the learning. Participants share that they felt obligated not only because of the investment of the organization in their education but also because of their leadership role. As such, they referred to the transfer of learning as “an obligation and a duty”. Reflecting on their responsibility to accomplish their goals, strategies such as “inclusion”, “empowerment”, “seeing work as a calling”, and “leading with confidence” were common among the participants in this study who were eager to bring the new learning back to the organization. The two subthemes generated from the analysis of this study are: (a) I have an obligation to transfer, and (b) I have opportunities to transfer. Participants’ statements on their obligation to transfer are presented in Table 4.
### Table 4

**Statements of Obligation to Transfer**

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<tr>
<th>Smiley’s Statements</th>
<th>I have an obligation to Transfer:</th>
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<td></td>
<td>I think if you're a caring labor leader ... in any capacity, I think if you gain knowledge, you bring it back. It was just the natural progression to come back from that knowledge and rely on it and try to roll it into, part of work, part of the movement.</td>
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<td>I look forward to the opportunity to provide a tremendous and honorable return on the investment of enrollment in the Labor Executive Program.</td>
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<th>Gilmore’s Statements</th>
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<td></td>
<td>It's great in the sense that they think enough of me to send me here, but then the realization hits, it's not just, you don't just get to go and then come back and go…. Then there are expectations, at least for me, that you got to do other things above and beyond what you've been doing. It was very exciting and very, it was a confidence booster, but also a little shock to the system about wow, there's more expectations here now.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A sense of responsibility, I guess, because we spent a lot of money to send me there. Organizationally, it was I believe well worth it, but there's also a responsibility to do something with it once you're there, and bring it home.</td>
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<th>Girgan’s Statements</th>
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<td></td>
<td>I felt considerable responsibility absolutely. I felt that's why I went there. Not only that's why I was sent there, I felt that it was, in many respects a calling. It's a privilege to serve people and to try to make a difference in the lives of working families and there's, it's a huge responsibility.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When you're afforded the opportunity to get the training and the exposure that we received at an institution such as Northeast, I think if you don't deem that a responsibility there's something wrong with you.</td>
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Wally’s Statements

I have an obligation to transfer:

My roles changed and so, the buck now stops with me. Not with somebody else. So, I probably have a slightly higher interest and a vested responsibility in making sure that 15,000 people are looked after, which is a fairly heavy weight on my shoulders. And so, to some extent, I'm now finding myself peeling back further into what I did there to go what else can I bring? What might I have glossed over that I might need to reconsider and think about?

This course was being used by my union as way of succession planning…. But, six weeks is a long time, and six weeks is expensive from an international perspective, but it's also expensive from an investment perspective of my time to be away from my role. And I think everybody on the program would have realized that that was a big compromise for their union to make to let somebody go.

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Rose’s Statements

I have an obligation to transfer:

Attending the Northeast Labor Executive Program will allow me to bring new insight to my work for the organization and to better assist others who seek a voice in their workplaces and their advocacy as professionals.

Well, I think I felt an obligation because my employer was the one who funded my ability to go to Northeast. To come back here and share some of the things that I learned.

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Summer’s Statements

I have an obligation to transfer:

It was so great to be able to take a step away from your work - and just use your br- ... like, just think and dream and, you know, really, like, reinvest in why you're doing this work, and also just reflect on the energy that you're putting in, and make sure that you take care of yourself, and that sort of thing. So, it was really good to just be able to step away.

Well, I did feel very obliged to do so because my employer paid for it.

Findings from Table 4 show that participants felt obligated not only because of the investment of their organization in their education, but also because of their role of leadership. It was evident from the data that participants took their leadership role seriously and tried to lead
with union values some more direct in their approach than others. For instance, a look at the data shows that most of the participants’ priorities were on their organization, and the members. At the same time, Summer’s statement appears to be solely on herself. While one may question her statement of taking care of self as leading with values, taking care of self to better serve others is very much recommended for leadership effectiveness.

I have opportunities to transfer. There is a perception that there is so much one can do due to the limited freedom that their role allowed, and the participants in the study varied regarding their perception of how their role or position in their union impacted their ability or control over the transfer of learning. While it was evident that all of the participants had control over the transfer of learning that was related to their specific goals, there was the presumption in some that their role did not allow them full control. When asked, however, about a time they were able to transfer in their specific position, most of them were very successful in giving examples of transfer and in showing which courses allowed them to achieve these goals. Table 5 below presents examples of transfer of learning shared by the participants.

Table 5

*Examples of Transfer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smiley’s Example of Transfer of Learning</th>
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<td>I now sit on the City Pension Board, and we had a lot of talks of pension, and I continually would go back to some of those learning to ensure that the party that was in power did not feel that a defined benefit pension plan was a risk that the city should not be taking; that the liability, that they felt, was founded; that we were sound. We had sound funding, and we as a Local, myself have done the most to protect the pension for</td>
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all city employees. And I think that was one of the most returns on tangible learning investments.

**Gilmore’s Example of Transfer of Learning**

We've done the last 12 months, done three different SWOT analysis for local unions in different areas. That's something we hadn't done ever in the region. Slowly but surely, convincing folks that that's something we could do, and you got to strategically plan and putting it together, we've been able to do some of those things. Getting locals to understand that you could.... Yeah, those fires are out there, but if you prioritize, you don't have to just go put the new fire out every day. You can prioritize which fire to put out, or which fire to start on… Putting those plans in place for them and helping them go through that exercise, we did it over a day and a half, going through all of it, laying out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and then going through okay, what's the next step, what's the plan, and what are we going to focus on.

**Girgan’s Example of Transfer of Learning**

I don't like wasting too much time. I'm go, go, go, and so people that are in the labor movement, it's like government. Nothing happens too quickly. It took me a long time to figure that out. And so finally, I've come to accept, okay, this, we've got to just go through the steps. You got to go through this process, and it's frustrating sometimes. But it has saved me a lot of aggravation, learning that through some of those group learning strategies that we had. NLEP has helped me to temper my style a little bit, so I've become more diplomatic. I use more diplomacy and tact to get along. And so, it's like, sometimes you got to choose which hill you want to die on, right? It's like, I don't pick as many battles as I used to. I choose the ones that are important.
**Wally’s Example of Transfer of Learning**

You do find yourself trying to overlay your decision making with some of the things that you recall, and that's an interesting concept in terms of the way you conduct yourself in a meeting for example. Where you will be playing with strategy or a strategic decision and you find your mind shifting to try and overlay, well, if I do this what might this mean. I'll give you an example perhaps. The last few months, I've been really thinking about the possibility of taking the position I was appointed to, and so I was planning in my mind well, what structural changes would I make within the union? What deficiencies do I see? And from an internal structure, how can I make this work better from an organizing point of view?

**Rose’s Example of Transfer of Learning**

We talked a lot about in our classes at NLEP... about getting our younger members involved. So we've tried to put together.... And we're still working on it; we still don't have it done to perfection yet.... But reaching out to the newer members bringing them together and talking to them and actually bringing some of our more senior members.... To try to be inclusive in getting them active in the union. They only know that they go to work someplace. They become a member, and that's it. They don't know what the obligation is to the union and stuff like that. So, we’re working on that aspect of it, and we've had some success, in some areas, but it's a work in progress.

**Summer’s Example of Transfer of Learning**

Shortly after I returned from Northeast, there was some discussion started about reorganizing the program. And so, I did. I was able to use some of that information to reorganize my thoughts in a bigger picture and present the concept to my executive
board. Write a proposal, think of the objectives, and the strategy, and I was able to do that with the expansion of the new program. I can feel that I'm able to ... you know ... I have changed. Like, I know that I am now learning from that experience, and from other experiences. You know, how to really.... And the NLEP class, or the Northeast program, really did help me be able to just look at the big picture and decide, you know, how am I going to move my goals forward with my program on a big picture, and sort of ignore some of the stuff, the small picture stuff, that doesn't matter as much.

A look at the above examples in comparison to the goals set by the participants at the beginning of the program shows that participants in this study had control over the transfer of learning that was closely related to their goals, which were set, from the start, according to their specific role in their union.

Participants’ Recommendations

Participants presented a few suggestions on how to enhance their post-educational experiences through reforms in program offerings. While most of the participants were reluctant to give suggestions, the few suggestions received varied from reducing the length of the program, selection of participants, and integration of more learning activities that foster transfer of learning, to follow-up courses. To illustrate, Wally, who is now the head of his union and in charge of selecting participants in his union to send to the program, was the most vocal about reforming the program to cater the offerings to specific level of leadership. Using the following metaphor “it is horses for courses”, he thought that the program should be directed to senior level union leaders only. He argues:
I have that view that this isn't a trade union program that should be directed at junior people in the union movement. I genuinely don't think that they would have the ability to use that in a meaningful way but not even use it.... It's even to exercise the thinking because to exercise the thinking you need to be forced into a position where you have to think about it, and that only comes from having a seat at the table. So, if you're in the room and the buck stops with you, when you've got to make those strategic decisions, you are going to be forced to overlay that in your mind.

His argument is that in order for the union organizations to fully benefit from the transfer of learning, participants have to be in high position of leadership and must have the capacity to fully understand all the concepts presented. He further declares:

There is no point to me, from my experience, sending somebody that's fairly junior in our organization to learn some of those things and to think about things that they can't do. What I did and that is, as I said to you, the bits that I overlay in my thinking that reflection and that thinking comes from having the capacity to actually make those decisions. If you don't have the capacity to do that, it's not the right course for you. I firmly follow.

An alternative to this, he mentions, is to shorten the program to four weeks and change the offerings to more focused program for participants at each level. He contends:

I personally feel that it would be a better approach to have a range of courses more targeted to the level of the person within the organization. Because, then you ... And now, you're pulling them to engage with the content in a way that they can overlay it with what they do.
Summer, who is a junior in her union, emphasizes the same issue when she suggests giving participants opportunity to work on a specific problem, something, she recommends, participants could take back to work as a tangible solution to the many problems that they are facing. Given that opportunity, she felt that she would have benefited more from the program.

At the same time, while Wally thinks that this course should be directed to senior leaders only, Girgan’s thinks that some of the more senior participants did not take the course too seriously. His argument is that someone nearing retirement should not be participating in the program. He sees it as a waste of energy and resources. A remedy to their concern would be to follow Summer’s suggestion of the initiation of a mentoring program. This could give the more senior participants the opportunity to assist in the development of the younger generation, making the experience more meaningful for both parties.

Another suggestion from most of the participants is the initiation of follow-up courses for alumni, so they can continue on their journey of responsibility. Girgan, who was more vocal about the idea of follow-up courses, mentions:

We go to a place like Northeast. Our employers spend considerable amounts of resources sponsoring us to do that. I would think maybe once every two years, even for a weekend, you know, if it's a weekend follow up course. Something, so that somebody could go. As a trustee for example, for the pension, I'm mandated by Law in Canada that I have to go to a training educational course once per year. So, I think that would be a great benefit to anyone who attends.

While it was obvious that most of the participants had a hold on the learning transfer and understood their role and responsibility with the transfer of learning, these recommendations show concerns that need to be addressed.
Summary

To conclude, the study presented findings from the lived experiences of the participants with transfer of learning. Participants were able to detect a need for change that required their involvement and action. Because these changes required well-developed analytical skills, participants were more than willing to take the next step by enrolling in the program, which they felt could provide the platform for this type of knowledge and professional development.

Data showed that participants entered the program with volition and were elated about the value of the program and its many offerings, both of which motivated them to learn and enabled and motivated them to transfer the learning. While participants were all eager to bring the knowledge back to work, some mentioned that they encountered barriers that they had to overcome. Data showed that participants who were successful in transferring the learning right after the program were influenced by expectations and excitement from peers. Others were a bit reluctant due to the cultural climate and push backs received. However, considering the investment and the confidence booster that they received from participating in the program and from the trust that the organization put in them, they felt an obligation not only to transfer but also to involve their peers and/or staff involved in the learning. Data also showed that participants enjoyed the new connections that they made and saw the networking opportunity as enhancers of transfer of learning.

While data showed that there was no mention of a system in place to hold participants accountable/responsible for the transfer of learning, all participants felt a sense of responsibility to transfer the learning due to their commitment to the movement and the investment of their union in them. At the same time, there was the presumption from some that their role limited their ability to fully use the newly acquired learning; however, data showed that participants had
control over the transfer of learning both because of their position of leadership, no matter how limited it was, and also because of their ability to accomplish set goals. As such, when opportunities to transfer appeared, they took advantage of them and were able to transfer.

Participants also provided a few suggestions on how to enhance the experience and best utilize the networking opportunity through the establishment of a formal mentoring opportunity initiated at the start of the program. A follow-up course was also suggested along with some modification in the program offerings.

Relating Findings to Research Question

This study seeks to understand participants’ experiences with learning transfer, and how participants make meanings of these experiences. Vygotsky (1987) posits, “The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process” (as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 19). Seidman (2006) further explains this process as follow:

Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs.

(Seidman, 2006, pp. 18-19)

Based on the literature used in this study, training transfer starts with the characteristics of the participants themselves, and this includes their background, interests, and ability to learn and to transfer. While it is necessary that the learning organization and the workplace provide a situation conducive to learning and to transfer, it is also crucial that the individual learner accepts the challenge of learning and transfer. Data showed that participants in this study welcomed the responsibility of learning transfer in all the settings starting with their goals for their union in which they expressed their intention to learn and to transfer. The behavior continued throughout
the learning process. As they transitioned from the learning area to the workplace, the effort continued until they were able to accomplish their goals of transferring the newly acquired knowledge to their workplace. The data also showed that participants in this study took their job of labor leaders seriously and were able to demonstrate that as they expressed their appreciation and their “intellectual and emotional connections” (Seidman, 2006, p.18) when elaborating on their experience with learning transfer. In meaning-making, participants to this study acknowledged that it was their duty and obligation to acquire the knowledge and to put it to good use in the workplace, no matter the obstacles encountered. The hope is that they will continue the process and bring about the change that is so much needed in their work environment.

Participants were also asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Table 6 presents the answers in order of the interviews.

Table 6

*Participants’ Meaning-Making Reflections*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Since graduating from the program how do you feel about your accomplishments?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smiley</td>
<td>It hangs on my wall right next to my two degrees, the only thing is, it hangs just a little bit above it. It says Northeast University on it and it.... I wrote a little piece for the … Quarterly and although I have my Undergraduate degree and my Masters degree, I wrote that it was the best educational experience that I've ever had.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilmore</td>
<td>I also think people knowing again that organizationally, they sent me, I think, changed their.... Like, &quot;Oh wow, they think enough of him to send him.&quot; I think that changed people's perception. Again, caused some jealousy, of course, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girgan</td>
<td>Well, I used to be able to ignore things. I cannot ignore things anymore. It's really hard. I don't know the world has become smaller as a result, and so my community of concern has now become a global community of concern, and I never really had that before…. The principle of <em>an injury to one is an injury to all</em> is one that has screwed me up in a good way because it's just opened my eyes up to the much bigger picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wally</td>
<td>Well, I'm the secretary… so, personally I think I've done pretty well, but it's not about me. It's not about me, it is about what am I achieving for our members. And look, since coming back, I think I've been able to probably hone my thinking a little more around strategic stuff. So, I've made ... some of that has been in the thought process for some months, and it's now operationalizing in the last month. And I think in the next six months, if you ask me the question again, I think I'll be able to say I'm seeing even more of the view, and it's impacted even more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>It's been a great learning experience, and I think coming back here to apply it, is kind of like the next phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>I felt really good. I think that things are... I'm continuing to move forward, which was always sort of ... It's always been sort of how I operate. I can't really just stay stagnant in a position. I'm constantly reinventing myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter V: Discussion of Findings

Referred to as the “so what” or “now what” phase of the learning process (Caffarella, 2002, p. 204), transfer of learning refers to the application of newly acquired learning in the workplace. The purpose of this study was to examine the post-educational experience of the graduates of an executive program for labor leaders as it relates to their responsibility to transfer what they have learned to their respective union or the labor movement. As such, the following question guided this study: How do graduates of an executive program for labor leaders make sense of their post-educational experience as it relates to the transfer of learning from the program to the workplace?

The practical and instrumental aim of this study was to improve the experience of the graduates of the NLEP with transfer of learning. Using Schlenker’s (1997) theoretical framework of personal responsibility, the study tried to understand participants’ perspectives on what it takes to transfer the newly acquired learning and the support that program participants may need to overcome potential barriers both during the program and at their worksite. Using GIA as the method to collect and analyze the data, participants in this study describe their personal experiences in two different situations and share their appreciation and concerns regarding the learning process and the different enhancers and barriers to the learning transfer. Some suggestions are also offered by participants on how to best assist NLEP participants in their learning process and in the transfer of learning. Research findings supported much of the contemporary literature used in this study. The findings are also consistent with Burke and Sacks’ (2009) research, which stipulates how trainees’ self-efficacy and accountability facilitate the transfer of learning.
What is significant about this study is its focus on accountability/responsibility and, more specifically, its focus on motivation to learn and to transfer and on the learner’s personal responsibility in the process. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. A discussion of the findings in relation to the literature is also presented. Conclusions drawn from the study is also presented. This chapter also explores implications for practice and presents recommendations for future research. As such, program staff, faculty, union organizations, leaders could be better equipped to assist labor leaders in the transfer of learning, which in a way could help labor leaders in effectively facing or overcoming the many challenges that their unions and the labor movement are facing. This can be accomplished by making sure that this study is used to revamp the NLEP curriculum through the integration of more materials and activities that foster learning transfer. Informing current and future faculty of the results of this study can also be effective in promoting change in their teaching style, teaching activities and course content. This study should also be used as a session in the NLEP orientation not only to inform future participants of their responsibility in the training transfer, but also to guide them throughout the program. As most NLEP participants are senior leaders in their unions, they are in position to effectuate change. This will ensure that changes that need to happen at the worksite to facilitate the transfer of learning also happen.

**Relating Theoretical Framework to Findings**

Schlenker’s Personal Responsibility theory was used to guide this study. The theory presents a framework to analyze and understand people’s responsibility in organizations or in society (Schlenker, 1997). Composed of three elements: prescriptions/expectations, event/action and identity/role, the theory posits that a strong linkage between the elements will have implications on the individual’s behavior and will determine what should be done in the
situation, how obligated the individual will feel, and how much control he or she will have over the event that will need to happen (Schlenker, 1997; Schlenker et al., 1994).

As such, a strong prescriptions/expectations-event/action link requires that goals that relate to a specific event or action are specified and not subject to other interpretation that would make it confusing (Schlenker, 1997). It is also pertinent that people know what to expect, and that they had proper requirements and know what to do (Schlenker, 1997). This criterion correlates with one of the criteria for admission into the NLEP, which requires participants to elaborate on their specific goals for their union and/or the labor movement. Findings showed that participants elaborated on problems that they were facing in their union and that needed practical solution, practical solution that the NLEP could provide the platform for. They all mentioned that they had problems that they needed to solve, and that their goals were based on finding solutions for their problems. A look at the data also shows that participants knew in advance what the program was about. This in a way led to the conclusion that all participants to this study have a very strong goal-event link.

Figure 1. The Pyramid of Accountability

SOURCE: Adapted from Schlenker et al., 1994, as figured in Burke & Sacks, 2009, p. 388.

As such, a strong prescriptions/expectations-event/action link requires that goals that relate to a specific event or action are specified and not subject to other interpretation that would make it confusing (Schlenker, 1997). It is also pertinent that people know what to expect, and that they had proper requirements and know what to do (Schlenker, 1997). This criterion correlates with one of the criteria for admission into the NLEP, which requires participants to elaborate on their specific goals for their union and/or the labor movement. Findings showed that participants elaborated on problems that they were facing in their union and that needed practical solution, practical solution that the NLEP could provide the platform for. They all mentioned that they had problems that they needed to solve, and that their goals were based on finding solutions for their problems. A look at the data also shows that participants knew in advance what the program was about. This in a way led to the conclusion that all participants to this study have a very strong goal-event link.
Another criterion for responsibility relates to a strong prescription/expectations-identity/role link, which stipulates that “the actor is perceived to be bound by the prescriptions by virtue of his or her identity” (Schlenker, 1987, p. 243). This criterion also relates to another criterion for admission into the program, which only accepts participants who are duly committed to their union and to the movement and in whom their union is willing to invest. As such, the program is totally dedicated to experienced labor leaders with capability and ability to effectuate change and only accepts participants with union sponsorship. Findings showed that opportunity to participate into the program fostered a sense of obligation, which in a way triggered intention to transfer. Based on the findings, the goals set by the participants were goals that they were able to accomplish in their specific role. This leads to the conclusion that all participants in this study have a very strong prescriptions/expectations-identity/role link, strength that, according to the theory, creates an obligation or duty to accomplish these goals.

The third criterion for responsibility, which is a strong role/identity-event/action link, refers to the amount of control participants had over the event that happened or should happen. According to the theory this link is strong when the individual “seems to intend to produce particular consequences and has the ability and freedom to do so” (Schlenker, 1987, p. 255). Goals set at the beginning of the program show intent to bring about change. Participation in the program focusing on these goals gives participants the ability to accomplish set goals. Based on their specific leadership role in their union, participants have the freedom/control to accomplish these goals.

While the findings of personal responsibility cannot be generalized to every participant to the program, the findings showed that the participants in this study entered the program with intent to learn and to transfer the learning. The findings also showed that participants were
aware of their obligation to transfer the learning, and by using or transferring the learning, they made the necessary efforts to ensure that their union was not investing in vain.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature**

Participants in this study, based on their role in the union, their commitment, and aspirations for their unions, had goals that they needed to fulfill, goals that directed them to search for more learning opportunities, which also gave them a purpose to want to learn. As could be seen from the findings, courses that were relevant to the participants’ goals and values kept them motivated. Based on the findings and scripts from participants’ essays, participants in this study entered the learning activities with sincere intention to transfer and were able to demonstrate transfer of learning based on the newly acquired learning despite difficulties encountered in the workplace. Findings showed that participants in this study were all seeking solutions to problems that could, in a way, enhance their livelihood. Findings also showed that due to the investment and their organizations expectations, participants felt obligated to bring the knowledge back to the workplace, which in a way enhanced their motivation to learn. This is consistent with other studies on transfer of learning which show that transfer is facilitated when trainees are motivated to learn (Baldwin, Ford & Blume, 2009; Blume, Ford, Baldwin & Huang, 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008; Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Tziner, Fisher, Senior & Weisberg, 2007; Wlodkowski, 2008).

Moreover, the enumeration of their intention and obligation to transfer the learning once acquired to the benefit of their union and of their members portrays the characteristics of leaders who are determined “to act according to labor’s core values and vision of social and economic justice, inclusion, human development and hope”, as Eaton (1992) suggested in her study of union leadership development presented in the literature review of this study in chapter two. The
data also showed that union leaders are determined to use mainstream organizational techniques such as strategic planning, which are commonly used in regular organizations, concepts that were also presented in the literature review in chapter two of this study.

**Conclusions Drawn from Study**

After analysis of the data, the theoretical framework, and the literature, it is evident that the participants in this study show personal responsibility, but it cannot be generalized. Considering the amount of the investment both from participants and from their union, and considering that the transfer process starts with the training provider and continues into the workplace, it is unethical to leave the responsibility to the learners alone (Caffarella, 2013). As such, three conclusions were drawn from this study, and their focus is on the ability of the participants to fully contribute to the learning, on issues pertaining to the program offerings, and on changes pertaining to the workplace. They are: a) participants’ readiness to learn, b) revamping of program offerings with strategies that foster transfer of learning, and c) importance of a welcoming work climate.

**Conclusion I: Participants’ Readiness to Learn**

One of the requirements for admission into the program is that participants write an essay describing their goals for their union and/or for the labor movement. Information provided in the essays shows that participants’ goals vary from professional development to organizational goals or both. With union membership density continuing to decline, participants were very concerned about the direction that the labor movement is taking, and as such goals such as “looking for new tactics or strategies that others are using” or “looking to discuss with like minded individuals” were common between participants. For instance, Smiley found that there is always “a big learning curve when someone new is elected”, and one of his goals is to focus on establishing “a
succession plan in his union”, something that he thinks is needed in all unions. Using metaphors such as “low hanging fruits”, referring to members that he felt could be “recruited, retained and trained”, his goal is to make sure that he passes the “ball” or the “baton” as it was passed on to him. This concept is seconded by Rose who is also very determined about guiding the younger generation as her mentor did for her at the beginning of her career in the union. While most of the other participants did not put much emphasis on the mentoring and development of the younger generation, one can detect that they were also concerned about fostering labor growth. Words such as “revitalization”, “empowerment”, “organize the unorganized”, “member engagement”, and “social change”, which portray the values of union leadership and commitment, were common among the participants.

These goals set at the beginning of the program by participants, as well as participants’ level of education and leadership role in their union, indicate readiness to learn. However, there were concerns that not everyone was as motivated as they needed to be. While most of the participants were concerned about the behavior or lack of enthusiasm from some of the participants, Wally was the most vocal. After explaining the hours that he had to spend reading and the strategies he used to make sure that he came to class “intellectually engaged”, strategies that he felt helped him get the best of the program, his suggestion was to provide the reading materials ahead of time, so participants could come to class “intellectually engaged”. His concern about the benefit of everyone’s involvement in the learning process was also addressed in the literature review of this study in chapter two by Bernard (2002b) in her paper on the use of case method in labor education.

**Conclusion II: Revamping of Program Offerings with Strategies that Foster Transfer of Learning**
Participants in this study were elated about the program offerings. As mentioned earlier, the case method and group activities, which entailed the use of “authentic application exercises” (Caffarella, 2002, as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 358) and offered a learning environment that was closely related to the workplace, were the main strategies used in program instruction and activities. The application process, which entailed an essay detailing their goals for the labor movement or for their union, was used as self-assessment and gave participants the opportunity to relate their learning to their specific goals and what could be transferred into the workplace. However, participants in this study found a lack of “direct transfer of learning strategies such as an action plan” or “a support group” (Caffarella, 2002, as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 359), tactics that, according to Caffarella (2002, 2013), could help in maintaining the transfer in the workforce. This relates to a few suggestions or recommendations made by one of the participants in this study regarding having an actual work problem that participants could work on during the program and establishing a formal mentoring opportunity from the start of the program with purpose of continuity into the workplace.

Moreover, it is also recommended that the topics being taught are “relevant and practical, connected to prior knowledge, competently learned, and practiced in relevant contexts” (Caffarella, 2002, as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 360). All of the courses taught in the program appear to be relevant in the development of union leaders and offer practical solutions to the many problems facing the labor movement and unions from around the world. Participants in this study expressed satisfaction with the repertoire of courses that was offered and felt competent enough to relate the content to their specific goals and to provide concrete examples of transfer of learning while revealing the course contents that helped them in achieving these goals.
However, there were mixed feelings about some of the course content. Participants found that some of the course content led to boredom due in part to their familiarity with the content and the course delivery. These concerns were mostly expressed by participants who hold credentials in these fields of study. Wally, who was the most vocal about this issue, also expressed his concerns about the length of the program and the idea that the course should not be directed to junior participants. His argument was that the junior leaders did not have the ability to comprehend, nor do they have the opportunity to use the skills. As such, he suggested a curriculum revamp, which should consist of either shortening the program to four weeks and/or directing the offerings to specific level of leadership. This, he mentioned, could allow participants to choose a specific concentration.

While his concerns and opinion could be genuine, they are in contradiction with one of the criteria for admission into the program, which is to encourage unions to send people who are duly motivated and committed to the movement, who can be promoted to higher levels of leadership after graduating from the program. His suggestion would also defeat the purpose of the program, which is to give everyone an opportunity to participate and encourage the integration of the younger generation into union leadership positions, something that is very much needed now as the older generation, which occupies most of the leadership in unions, is near retirement.

As an experiential learning program, the goal of the executive program is to provide participants the opportunity to learn from the best in the field including each other. As such, the best remedy could be the integration of strategies that foster transfer of learning. Summer, who is a young leader, suggests the implementation of a mentoring program from the start of the program and on. She also suggests that participants be allowed to bring a work problem that the
Conclusion III: Importance of a Welcoming Workplace Climate

Some of the participants experienced difficulty as they transitioned from the learning area to the workplace. After being away from work for six weeks to attend such a program, with colleagues having to do their tasks at time, it is understandable that there could be some “hint of jealousy” or even “resentment”. It is also understandable that one may have to start working on tasks that were neglected for the past six weeks and not have the luxury to continue on this dream or use the skills. If one was the only one in his/her union benefiting from such privilege, it is also understandable that not everyone will be as “jazzed up” as he/she was. While most of the participants might encounter such barriers, it could also be that everyone was excited about their return, especially if one had a buddy who went with him/her, or if their peers expected or were promised to attend the program one day. Findings showed that participants who were able to easily transfer the newly acquired learning through informal learning activities such as coaching or simple conversations belonged to the latter category. Rose mentions how everyone was congratulating her, encouragements that gave her the opportunity to teach, to mentor, to coach, and to even give them a taste of the experience by inviting one of the faculty to teach in one of her rallies. Wally, who used the buddy system, explains how everyone was waiting to find out what they brought back. Smiley who did not have anyone in his entourage attending the program, and had no idea when and how someone in his entourage could have the opportunity to attend, except through his fundraising initiative, also invited a faculty to give his staff a taste of the learning, so he can effectively transfer the learning. While this was done through Skype, he felt reassured that he could share the experience with his staff. All this is consistent with Gilpin-
Jackson and Bushe’s (2007) study of leadership development, which was also presented in chapter two of this thesis.

Considering that this study focuses on accountability/responsibility, allocating enough time for the transfer of learning and trying to integrate the new learning in the role of both the people using it and the people experiencing the consequence of the new learning are crucial in the transfer of learning. These strategies can also assist leaders in overcoming the barriers that they encounter (Caffarella, 2002, as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008) especially as it relates to the “broom syndrome” that a few participants mentioned having experienced. As mentioned earlier, the “broom syndrome” refers to resentment and jealousy expressed by others when trainees return to the workplace exhibiting their new knowledge too fast. The accountability on both sides could definitely increase the transfer of learning as long as there is hope for all to participate in the program.

Organizational support, which entails having everyone onboard including key leaders and staff who may see the transfer as beneficial to the organization, is also crucial to foster and to maintain the transfer of learning (Caffarella, 2002, as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008). To foster transfer and to get the return on their investment, more support is needed from union organizations. This entails the establishment of incentives, rewards, and structural adjustments to accommodate the transfer of learning.

This leads to the implications for practice that this study generates, which could help unions, the NLEP program staff and the leaders themselves in their quest for practical solutions to their problem of practice.
Implications for Practice

This study should be used to revamp the NLEP curriculum. This entails the integration of a substantial amount of materials and activities that foster learning transfer. Informing current and future faculty of the results of this study can also be effective in promoting change in their teaching style, their teaching activities and their course content. This study should also be used as a session in the NLEP orientation not only to inform future participants of their responsibility in the training transfer, but also to guide them throughout the program. As most NLEP participants are senior leaders in their unions, they are in positions to effectuate change. This will ensure that changes that need to happen at the worksite to facilitate the transfer of learning also happen.

As recommended by some of the participants, practices should focus on the establishment of a formal mentoring opportunity matching older leaders with emerging leaders and giving them the opportunity to learn from each other. Such mentoring opportunity should continue after the end of each session if needed.

This mentoring initiative can be extended to the younger generation outside of the union, such as students in higher education. This will help in the expansion of an already established NLEP joint-venture with purpose to diversify and help grow the labor movement. The opportunity for practice will be not only the expansion of such mentoring program, but also the development of as many mentors as possible to reach out and help groom the younger generation for the labor movement.

Another opportunity for practice would be to make sure that participants in the program bring with them actual work problems that could be used as case studies, allowing participants to go back to work with something tangible.
Follow-up was also seen as lacking in the program, and many participants suggested needing that type of support to help them in the transfer of learning. Considering that participants found the relationships established with their classmates to be positive, and felt that more was needed to help them achieve their common goals in the movement, another recommendation would be the institutionalization of an alumni engagement program, which could connect alumni from all classes.

As most of the graduates of the NLEP are now in the highest position of leadership in their union, consulting with them on the institutionalization of factors that enhance transfer of learning in the workplace might be a welcome gesture from someone who has managed the program for the past 17 years and who has the credentials and a study that informs her findings.

This study can also be seen and/or used as a template for other executive programs. It is hoped that the impact of this research will have 360° effect, and the goal is to see its impact anywhere that executive education is being delivered. As higher education is being examined and many people are realizing the value of an executive education credential, it needs to be considered that adult learners, with extensive life experiences, are best able to take executive education opportunities seriously. Organizations should also have this information, so that they can advise the program participants that they send about their expectations to hopefully come out of the executive education with transferable skills that can benefit the organization.

My hope is to use this dissertation as a template for any educational endeavors after which participants will enter or return to the workplace. As a consultant or an educational leader in the field, my role will be to inform organizations on the best delivery practice and how best to motivate their workforce in giving their best to the organization and hopefully assist in the grooming of the leaders of tomorrow.
Recommendations for Future Research

Burke and Sacks (2009) argues that there is a need for more theoretical research based on accountability for transfer of learning. While the focus of this study is on leaders’ personal responsibility, there was no indication that any of the organizations had any kind of accountability process in place. As such, future research should focus on finding out the type of accountability processes in place in the unions. If put in place, other research should explore learners’ reaction to new procedures of accountability mentioned above and their intention to see them institutionalized. While participants to the program are from all races, this study only included Caucasian participants. Future research could focus on different races. Moreover, considering that this study was conducted with a minimal number of participants, a quantitative study might also be fruitful.

Final Reflections

For more than 17 years, I sat on the side line, “Achieving a balcony perspective” (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002, p. 52), looking in and observing labor leaders matriculating through the NLEP, wondering whether or not they were using the skills acquired in the workplace. This curiosity, which led to my dissertation, finally gave me a place on the dance floor. Now that I can access the dance floor as a thought leader, leadership informed by my research in Labor Leadership and Education, I intend to contribute to the movement by becoming this agent of change so much needed in the labor movement these days. My dissertation, which explores the experience of the participants of the NLEP with transfer of learning, gives me another perspective and forces me to take action. While I cannot admit that I have that calling in me to be at the forefront of the movement, my years of experience, looking in from the balcony, and this new dance, that I have just learned, give me the tools to be part of the movement. As a
thinker and a practitioner, my task will be to inform, to guide, and to develop the young generation to keep the movement growing. This can be accomplished, hopefully, through my teaching at the NLEP and/or through the development of a new mentoring program within the NLEP.

In the past 14 years, one of my most satisfying professional endeavors is my leadership role and continuing involvement in a mentoring program for minority students in higher education. In such endeavor, my organization collaborates with a union institution to increase the number of young activists in the labor movement. With purpose to diversify and help grow the labor movement, this labor mentoring program gives minority students the opportunity to experience the labor movement firsthand with the intent to motivate them to consider working for the union after graduation. Although effective in its purpose, more effort is needed to reach out to as many young individuals as possible and help develop as many mentors as possible. As an agent of change, my goal is to collaborate with other labor organizations to expand this initiative. This accomplishment is the first step towards one of my many future endeavors and might hopefully open many doors as consultant, blogger, writer, and analyst to keep the movement growing.
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