

Rethinking Industry Partnerships for Business Education in Canadian Polytechnics: A Blended Triple Helix–Stakeholder Model

Teagan Gahler

Abstract

This poster explores the underexamined role of industry–academia partnerships in Canadian polytechnic business education. While polytechnics are widely recognized for applied learning in technical fields, business programs remain under-explored in both policy and research. The purpose of this poster is to evaluate existing engagement frameworks and identify structural and relational gaps that limit sustained industry involvement in business curricula. Peer-reviewed and grey literature were thematically analyzed using an integrative review methodology, guided by the Triple Helix Model and Stakeholder Theory. The findings indicate that current partnership frameworks are often fragmented, inconsistently scaled, and insufficiently attentive to leadership development and interdisciplinary business skills. As a result, business students face constrained opportunities for meaningful industry engagement and graduate with gaps in employability, adaptability, and leadership readiness. This poster proposes a blended framework that integrates the structural coordination of the Triple Helix with the relational flexibility of Stakeholder Theory to strengthen curriculum alignment, leadership development, and long-term collaboration. The framework highlights the need for more coherent funding models, scalable partnership strategies, and embedded stakeholder feedback mechanisms within business programs. As Canadian polytechnics respond to shifting labour market demands, this work contributes to broader discussions on strengthening industry–academic collaboration and graduate employability across higher education.

Keywords: Industry-academia partnerships, Canadian polytechnics, Business education, Leadership development, Engagement frameworks

Poster

Rethinking Industry Partnerships for Business Education in Canadian Polytechnics

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Abstract

This integrative literature review explores the underexamined role of industry-academia partnerships in Canadian polytechnic business education. While polytechnics are lauded for applied learning in technical fields, business programs remain marginalized in both policy and research.

The review evaluates current engagement frameworks and identifies structural and relational gaps that limit industry involvement in business curricula. It proposes a blended framework combining the Triple Helix Model with Stakeholder Theory to strengthen leadership development, curriculum alignment, and long-term collaboration.

Methodology

- Integrative literature review (Whittemore & Knafli, 2005)
- 48 studies (2011–2025) and grey literature from Polytechnics Canada, Mitacs, Statistics Canada
- Databases searched: Scopus, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar
- Thematic coding with Atlas.ti, guided by Triple Helix Model and Stakeholder Theory Outcome: systemic gaps identified, and a blended framework proposed for polytechnic business education

Research Gaps

- Business programs marginalized compared to STEM in research and funding
- Evaluation focused on quantitative outcomes, neglecting leadership and soft skills
- Partnerships often fragmented, short term, and inconsistently scaled
- Funding and policy priorities misaligned with business education needs

Proposed Blended Model

Triple Helix Model	Stakeholder Theory Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions drive innovation, research and development • Government develops policies and funding mechanisms to enable collaboration • Industry invests in applied research to foster innovation and supports R&D • Collaboration tends to focus on outputs metrics • Industry-academia partnerships are often more formal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers and alumni co-develop curricula for workforce alignment • Students and faculty provide iterative feedback on partnership and program design • Employers mentor students and validate program outcomes for relevance • Stakeholders prioritize leadership, accountability, and skill development • Industry-academia partnerships are more informal
<p>Blended Framework Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced funding for business programs to address underrepresentation • Co-designed curricula incorporating academic and industry priorities • Developmental metrics to measure leadership, adaptability, and strategic thinking • Continuous feedback loops involving industry, alumni, and students harnessed in a standardized dashboard • Policy reforms to standardize funding models and prioritize interdisciplinary collaboration • Embedding leaderships and strategic thinking modules in the classroom co-taught by academic and industry professionals 	

By 2040, vacancies in knowledge-based services are projected to rise by 35%, with leadership and adaptability ranked as the most in-demand skills" (Harmadi & Nelson, 2024)

35%

Theoretical Frameworks

Recommendations

- Strengthen leadership development as a core outcome of business education
- Expand research on business-focused partnerships within Canadian polytechnics
- Pilot the blended model in select institutions to test scalability and refine metrics

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Teagan Gahler is an instructor in the JR Shaw School of Business at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She holds a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from Athabasca University and a Bachelor of Business Administration from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Education at the University of Derby in Derby, United Kingdom. Her research interests focus on industry-academia collaboration, Boundary spanning leadership in higher education, applied business education, and enhancing student employability in polytechnic institutions. Teagan lives in Edmonton, Alberta and loves to spend time outside in the mountains outside of school and work.
