



NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR

CO-OP SPECIFIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2017



DUGUID
CONSULTING



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Much has been done. Much is being done, but the task continues. The need for training, for thought, and for envisioning what might yet be undertaken – the same needs that the pioneers in Canada and other lands recognized – do not disappear... Answering those needs is one of the biggest challenges faced by the movement's stewards and researchers in every generation.

IAN MACPHERSON

Context¹

- The 5th principle requires the co-operative sector to provide education and training for members, employees and to inform the public.
- Different education and training is needed for managers, directors, members, and employees.
- There is a lack of clarity about where managers, directors, employees and members are getting co-op specific education or training.
- There is a lack of clarity about whether there is interest in co-op specific education or training.
- There is a lack of clarity regarding the content and delivery of co-op specific education and training.

1

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Recent studies around co-operative education and training have described the co-operative education and training context from the supply side. In the past decade a variety of co-operative education programs were developed and launched in Canada. Most of these were post-graduate (degree or certificate) programs. Some had a specific focus on co-operatives (e.g., the MA program at Saint Mary's University, the MA program at University of Sherbrooke, the certificate program at York University, the interdisciplinary PhD program at the University of Saskatchewan), while others had a broader "social economy" or community economic development" focus (e.g., the MBA program at Cape Breton University).

From a study completed in 2014, graduates from the university programs which are dedicated to the co-operative model have a good level of program satisfaction. Additionally, 65% of graduates from co-operative education programs feel they have a significant or moderately significant impact on their co-operative's performance.² While the co-operative sector has provided support for some of these programs and there is a good level of satisfaction exiting the programs, the programs have trouble

attracting a significant number of students (especially vis-à-vis the size of the sector and the number of students in conventional business programs). There are fewer than 100 students in Canada taking a higher education program focused on co-operatives.³ Yet using the most recent information from the Government of Canada, in 2012 there were 7,906 non-financial co-operatives in Canada spanning all provinces and territories with 86,272 full-time and part-time jobs.⁴ Adding the financial co-operatives, in 2012 there were just over 8,225 co-operatives in Canada. Compounded to this, we have seen the gradual disappearance of co-operation as a model in economics and business schools curricula⁵, yet there are 110,000 business school graduates⁶ in Canada every year.

Another major supplier of education and training are the co-operatives themselves, as well as associations and federations offering seminars and workshops to target audiences which are first managers/executive directors, followed by board members.⁷ While not specifically within the formal higher education realm, the ongoing education by the co-operative sector of its managers and board members is an important piece of the education and training puzzle.

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- 2 Miner, K. and Guillotte, C.A (2014). Relevance and Impact of Co-operative Business Education On line: https://www.usherbrooke.ca/irecus/fileadmin/sites/irecus/documents/pertinence_impact_education_entreprise_coop/rapport_final_en.pdf
 - 3 This number is an approximate total formulated from a count of students in current co-operative specific university programs.
 - 4 Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. (2016). *2012 Co-operatives in Canada*. Government of Canada. Ottawa. http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/693.nsf/eng/h_00116.html
 - 5 Webster, A., & Walton, J. K. (2012). *Introduction*. Business History, 54(6), 825-832.
 - 6 Pan-Canadian Standard Classification of Education (PCSCE) (2016) Classification of Instructional Programs, Primary Grouping (CIP_PG) – Business, Management, and Public Administration. <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26>. Accessed October 28, 2016
 - 7 Hancock, E. and Brault, A. (2015). *The fifth principle in action: Mapping the co-operative educational Initiatives of Canadian co-operatives*. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. University of Saskatchewan.

There is also a broader context in which this needs assessment can be located. This is the changing nature of the economy and the state over the last several decades. The economy has been characterized not only by trade liberalization but also by the digital revolution, which has transformed entire industries, giving rise to a wide variety of new products and services, while making other sectors virtually obsolete. For its part, the state has withdrawn significantly in recent years from its support for social service funding and job training and creation, while encouraging the private sector to play a greater role in these areas. Higher education has also been affected by these reforms, including suffering significant budget cutbacks and being charged with playing a more significant role in business education and training, across a full range of its programs (not just in business schools). Additionally, the higher education sector is increasingly looking to provide students with more tangible, “hands-on” learning opportunities in businesses (e.g., placement programs, internships, “co-op programs”), as well as playing a significant role in incubation and support for new enterprises (especially in new tech areas, but also in local economic development).

To look more deeply at this context, CMC’S delegates voted unanimously in favour of a resolution to develop a strategy on Higher Education for Co-operatives in Canada. A Task Force, composed of academics from a number of universities and co-operative practitioners from co-ops and federations, was formed to investigate the higher education situation for co-operatives. The Task Force agreed a needs assessment should be conducted.

The reasons leading to the resolution and the launching of a needs assessment were further confirmed by the respondents of the needs assessment research study. 70 percent of the respondents to the members and employees survey have taken co-op specific education or training on the co-operative model. And 59% of those respondents stated they were generally satisfied with the program or course taken. In terms of managers and directors, 60% of interviewees have taken co-op specific education, most of which is offered through their co-operative (in-house). Only 17 percent (5) of managers and directors have taken a university course with co-operative content. This could be university programs or courses taken part time or full time, undergraduate or graduate, on-line or in person, or of any length. For employees and members, 70 out 260 have taken a university course with co-operative content and 71% of them are generally satisfied.

Among the members and employees who have not taken any specific education or training program or course on the co-operative model, the most important reasons submitted are the lack of awareness of programs offered (33%), and unavailability (26%). A minority of respondents mentioned the irrelevance of a program dedicated to co-operatives for their career (8%) or their work (10%). For managers and directors, awareness was nuanced depending on industry and region. For example, the Credit Union Directors Achievement (CUDA) program was mentioned by interviewees from credit unions, but not by anyone else. Of the university programs listed (in order of frequency IRECUS, SMU, UQAM, York, USask) many were named because of the geographic closeness to the interviewee. However, managers and directors are more familiar by far with in-house training than programs or training offered externally.

Interestingly, 64 percent of respondents to the survey (members and employees) do feel there is a willingness to enhance co-op knowledge and skills within their co-operative. Also, 60 percent of respondents reported that co-op leaders support enhancing co-op knowledge and skills within their co-op. In terms of managers and directors, 40% identified co-op specific education or training would be helpful to them in order to provide a competitive edge, to internalize co-op values and principles, to help with interpersonal issues, and to provide the basics of co-operatives.

Given this context, what does the co-operative sector need in terms of co-op specific higher education and training?

This executive summary reports the results in three sections:

1. Co-op specific education and training needs of employees and members;
2. Co-op specific education and training needs of managers and directors;
3. Key findings and next steps towards a strategy.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach was used to get at the heart of co-op specific education and training needs.

To begin, a focus group of co-operators (approximately 100) was held at the 2016 CMC Congress. The information gleaned from this activity was key to focussing the interview guide and survey tool, as well as securing participants for the study.

371 respondents filled in the survey. Among those respondents, 99 identified as being members only, 148 as being employees only, and 123 as being both member and employee. We present the results as two different samples: all those who identified as members and both (271 respondents) and all those who identified as employees and both (222 respondents).

28 interviews were conducted with those who identified as managers (21) and directors (12) from all industries, types and sizes of co-operatives, as well as regions across Canada. Special attention was paid to where the interviewees are in terms of their career. This provided insight into the similarities and differences for managers and directors, including the multiple hats people wear as managers and directors as is the case for many who work in worker co-ops, as well as the interviewees who have both roles in different co-operatives.

Employees and Members

Co-op Specific Education Needs

EMPLOYEES

Among the 271 employees surveyed, 196 (72%) have taken a specific education or training program or course on the co-operative model. More than two thirds of those employees (124/182) who have taken co-op education or training are generally satisfied. The results of the study among employees who answered the survey are presented in three sections: interests/motivations, content and delivery of co-operative education and training.

Interests/Motivations

More than two-thirds of respondents show a high interest (70%) in co-op education and training in order to gain co-operative skills or knowledge. The contradiction comes then when only 34% of respondents indicated that they encounter situations where co-op knowledge or skills would help them to address the issues in their work.

The following table lists the most popular reasons for respondents to register for co-op-specific education or training. The answers for the most part are to be expected; for example, a lot of interest is in the program objective and the length of program. It is noteworthy that respondents have identified an interest in credentials or certificates.

REASONS FOR REGISTERING FOR CO-OP SPECIFIC EDUCATION OR TRAINING

REASON	PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO CHECKED IMPORTANT, VERY IMPORTANT OR IMPERATIVE
Program Objective	93%
Length of program or course	86%
Price	81%
Location	78%
Facilitator	72%
Incentives from employer	66%
Certificate of completion	55%
Academic credentials	42%

When asked specifically if academic credential is important, very important or imperative in their choice to register for a program, only 33% answered positively; whereas, 55% answered that a certificate was important. According to respondents, the official recognition of the knowledge and skills is the main reason explaining the importance of the academic credentials and/or a certificate. Expanding the range of career prospects comes second.

58 percent of employees stated they would be willing to pay for co-op-specific education or training.

When asked how important their co-op specific education and training is with respect to their professional life, employees were fairly consistent that it was important across the board. Improving the performance of the co-op topped rounded out the top, followed by helping to effectively complete your work, and then helping to advance your career.

IMPORTANCE OF CO-OP EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO PROFESSIONAL LIFE

ASPECTS OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE	PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO CHECKED IMPORTANT, VERY IMPORTANT OR IMPERATIVE
In helping you to effectively complete your work	77%
In helping you advance in your career	65%
In improving the performance of your co-operative	84%

Content

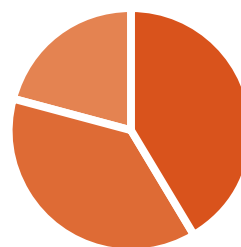
The following five topics in co-op specific programs and training for employees were identified as the most important (in order of priority):

- Co-operative identity
- Co-operative strategic leadership
- Co-operative governance and decision making
- Member participation
- Co-operative organizational structure and function

As will be presented, these education or training topics emerge time and again for all target audiences.

Delivery format

The responses regarding where employees would prefer to take education or training suggest interest in in-house training or from the co-op sector. In-house training is defined as offered by their co-operative, whereas, co-op sector means offered by a co-operative federation or a provincial association. While not everyone is interested in the university experience, 21% have acknowledged that they are curious about what universities offer for co-operative education and training.



- In-house: 41.59%
- Co-op sector: 37.82%
- University/College: 20.58%

When asked in what other ways co-op-specific education or training could be delivered that would be more appropriate, employees chose "Occasional co-operative learning activities for members and employees" and "In person attendance" as their favourite responses.

MEMBERS

Among the 222 members surveyed, 157 (72%) have taken co-op specific education or training. Concerning their level of satisfaction, 57% (90/157) consider themselves generally satisfied. 62% (79/128) have taken a program or course when becoming a member of a co-operative. The results regarding the members are presented in three sections: interests/motivation, content and delivery format.

Interests/Motivation

127/188 (68%) of members who answered the survey are interested, very interested or even extremely interested in taking co-op education or training program to help gain co-op specific skills or knowledge.

The following table lists the reasons influencing members the most to register for co-op-specific education or training. Similar to employees, there are no outlying answers that beg explanation, except the credential and certificate reasons.

REASONS FOR REGISTERING FOR CO-OP SPECIFIC EDUCATION OR TRAINING

REASON	PERCENTAGE OF MEMBERS WHO CHECKED IMPORTANT, VERY IMPORTANT OR IMPERATIVE
Program Objective	93%
Length of program or course	81%
Price	82%
Location	81%
Facilitator	75%
Incentives from employer	60%
Academic credentials	60%
Certificate of completion	52%

When asked specifically about credentials 34% of members consider it important or very important (not imperative). The main reason identified to explain the importance of the academic credential is the official recognition of the knowledge and skills. Expanding the range of career prospects comes second. Hand in hand with credentializing, 55% of members indicated that a certificate of completion offered by the sector or their co-operative is important. The main reason

again is that it provides official recognition of the knowledge and skills of the respondent.

When asked how important their co-op specific education and training is with respect to various aspects of their professional life, members answered fairly uniformly (not unlike the employee responses). It is interesting that members feel learning more about their co-op could advance their career, even a little bit, when they do not necessarily work in the co-op sector.

IMPORTANCE OF CO-OP EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO PROFESSIONAL LIFE

ASPECTS OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE	PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO CHECKED IMPORTANT, VERY IMPORTANT OR IMPERATIVE
In helping you to effectively complete your work	76%
In helping you advance in your career	60%
In improving the performance of your co-operative	84%

Interestingly, 65% (107/174) members would be willing to pay for co-op-specific education or training.

To the question: “How important was your co-op-specific education and training with respect to you becoming and continuing to be a member?” 53% considered their training as important.

Content:

The following five topics in co-op specific education and training were identified as the most important (in order of priority):

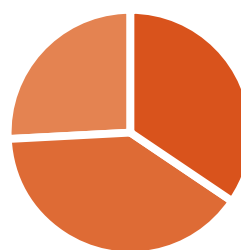
- Co-operative governance and decision making
- Co-operative identity
- Member participation
- Co-operative strategic leadership
- Co-operative organizational structure and function.

These are the same for employees.

These findings suggest some key conditions for members to take co-op specific education and training. These include training objective, length, price, location, facilitator, incentives from employer, and career advancement, which are similar answers to employees.

Delivery format

The responses regarding where members would prefer to take co-op specific education or training:



- In House: 34.59%
- Co-op sector: 39.46%
- University/College: 25.95%

The percentages are similar to employees, except that members prefer training to come from the co-op sector. When asked what are there other ways co-op-specific education or training could be delivered that would be more appropriate, members, like employees, indicate “Occasional co-operative learning activities for members and employees” and “In person attendance” as their favourite responses.

Managers and Directors Co-op Specific Education Needs

As presented earlier, 40 percent of managers and directors stated they would find co-op specific education or training helpful. This only presents part of the picture as 25% stated they did not think it was necessary. A more nuanced look at these answers presents, especially for managers, a struggle between wanting higher education that was co-op specific but also transferable to other sectors as well as the notion that the daily operations of a co-op are not really that different to warrant co-op specific training. About 60% of

interviewees expressed the need for co-op specific content to be inserted into the business school curriculum more effectively.

The interviewees were asked whether they encounter any **challenges** that co-op specific education or training would help with. The array of challenges discussed represents the life cycle of co-operatives, the changing economic and social context co-ops work in, and the particular operations, planning and leadership issues for co-ops.

CHALLENGE	FREQUENCY	CHALLENGE	FREQUENCY
Governance	9	No resources	2
Co-op values and benefits	5	Board work	2
No challenges	5	Sales	2
Leadership	4	Industry specific issues	2
External contextual changes	3	Financing	2
Member engagement	3	Start up	2
Good internal training	3	Lack of peer to peer connections	1
Legal issues	3	Succession planning	1
Roles of management and board	3	Operations	1
Accounting	3	Risk	1
Lack of awareness of co-ops	2	Innovation	1

In particular, both managers and directors reported that governance was one of the biggest challenges for their co-op. Interviewees felt that governance required co-op specific education or training. Some directors acknowledged that they have taken generic director training or programs to fill in their knowledge gaps. The other big challenge voiced was co-op values and benefits, which speaks to daily operations, governance, employee management, and member engagement. Not to go unrecognized, five people did state that they did not encounter any challenges they could not tackle.

Given these challenges, it is not a huge leap to understand why managers and directors have **identified the educative needs for the medium and long term**. Governance training from how to run a meeting to responsibilities of a director to how to work with management to co-op specific boards are all needed. How to invest in the culture of a co-op, which includes such topics as creating an identity, marketing the difference, promoting great workplaces, living the mission and vision, values, and imparting the big picture was also identified. Managers and directors are also concerned about how to best foster responsible co-op employees and directors; having knowledgeable and skilled people in the co-op. They also isolated good training or education as a need, which leads to supporting sound management skills and increasing awareness about co-operatives within employees, members and the general public. Importantly managers and directors spoke about the need for better sharing between co-operatives and co-op peers. As

one manager stated, "A community of practice is not in existence for co-ops. This would help to create lateral or peer to peer connections".

Thus far a context has been presented including what co-op specific education and training managers and directors have taken, their awareness of co-op specific education, and the challenges they currently encounter. What do managers and directors reveal when asked about what they need in terms of co-op specific education or training?

As identified by managers and directors, there is no silver bullet for **good co-op specific education or training**. Instead what emerges is a **set of characteristics** that should be taken into account when designing or implementing co-op specific education. The content, target audience and delivery mechanism needs to be taken into account. The delivery mechanism (i.e., webinar, in person, classroom, online) does not matter so long as it is appropriate for the content. Managers and Directors want meaningful training, do not want to waste their time, and for the most part want to have a deeper connection with their peer group in the co-op or co-operative sector. They want it to be quickly operational, to be gender equal, available and accessible to all ages, a mix of theory and practice, and for the content to be current and vital. They want "co-op specific education to produce professional business people for co-operatives". They do not for the most part want to go to university, even virtually, but want in-house education or training by seasoned, knowledgeable content experts with co-op experience and

adult education facilitation skills. Many are looking for some form of nonformal or informal learning plan for co-op specific education, which focuses on the knowledge and/or skills they need to do their job. One interviewee called this a “tracked learning journey”. As an individual they are willing to pay as is their co-op if they can see the value in doing it. Co-op specific training can be a one-off on a particular needful topic (i.e., governance, member engagement, co-op difference, finances, innovation, values, co-ops working with co-ops, or communications) or a program of sorts over a couple of years. Managers and directors want to make meaningful connections with their peers across the co-operative sector as a part of co-op specific education and training.

When asked about **outcomes** of co-op specific education, managers and directors were dedicated to a particular co-operative aesthetic. At the **individual level**, it should be working towards making better individuals by increasing technical knowledge and skills, developing better citizens, and strengthening their belief in the co-operative advantage. As one interviewee stated, “if employees are informed then they will be inspired”.

At the co-operative level, co-op specific education or training is working on a number of fronts. First and foremost, it should help to make better businesses (i.e., enhance social and economic value, promote local jobs and better workplaces, and advance the co-op difference through being a successful business). In other words, the “recognition of the potential of collective enterprises”. Hand

in hand with this, co-op specific education should also be developing better communities through promoting local economies, high social and economic value, peace building and just workplaces. As one interviewee stated, “Co-ops are good economics.”

Also at the co-op level, education and training should expand and enhance better partnerships and collaboration. For example, managers and directors talked about improving co-op to co-op trade and connection, co-operative to university/college/high school partnerships, co-op employee to co-op employee mentoring and peer networking, and deeper relationship building between big and small co-ops. There should be better awareness of co-operatives for the membership, employees, and general public. Co-op specific education would also promote better succession planning for co-ops, businesses, the board, and employees of all types. And finally, co-op specific education should fill in the gaps around training and education needs for co-ops. It should be in the mainstream curriculum of universities and colleges and specifically in the business schools’ curriculum. And while outside the scope of this research, it was apparent that participants felt co-op specific education should start earlier in high school and even elementary school. There should also be central services for co-op training and education offered by co-op content experts.

Main Findings

The goals of a needs assessment are threefold: first, discover the present thinking about co-op specific education and training of members, employees, managers and directors. Second, discover if there is a gap in terms of what is being offered and what the target audience needs. Third, depending on the answer, what could fill the gap?

Clearly from the research with managers, directors, employees, and members, there is a need and interest in and for co-op specific education and training, and the current educational opportunities are not well known and are not filling the need. There is room for focussing and redefining educational opportunities. The main findings from the research are:

1. There is no silver bullet for co-op specific education. There also is no one program, institution or course(s) that serves all.
2. All audiences are savvy consumers regarding education opportunities and want co-op specific education or training to be current, relevant and accessible.
3. They want to be inspired by the co-operative values, best practices and gain practical knowledge and skills. They are looking to co-op specific education to be a change agent that supports action, update and change.
4. The relevance of co-operative education and training still needs to be demonstrated. Participants show interest and think co-operative education and training could help their career and their co-operative, but do not necessarily feel they need co-op specific education and training to solve situations in their workplace.
5. The university as a venue is not the premier place for co-op specific education and training, even virtually. Participants want in-house/co-op sector education or training by seasoned, knowledgeable content experts with co-op experience and adult education facilitation skills.

6. There is a driving need for education or training on governance, co-op advantage/identity, and member engagement. There is a great need for practical and technical skills in these areas.
7. People involved with co-operatives want to connect in a meaningful way to their peer groups within their co-op and co-op to co-op through co-op specific education or training opportunities.
8. They want to have better co-ops, communities, employment, workplaces, skills and knowledge as a result of the co-op specific education or training. The transformational nature of co-op specific education or training has not been fully embraced or advanced enough by educators, learning institutions or co-operatives.
9. Participants are looking for innovative ideas gained through co-operative education and training in order to advance themselves and their employees, co-ops, and communities beyond traditional ideas about co-operatives and in order to be leaders in their industry.
10. There will always be people who do not want or need co-op specific education or training.

Next Steps

Armed with the findings of this needs assessment, a scan of what the sector offers in terms of in house training (Hancock and Brault, 2015)⁸, and a scan of what co-op content universities offer (Fairbairn, 2016)⁹, plus other experiences and insights, the Task Force will develop a Higher Education for Co-operatives Strategy in Canada.

The findings of this needs assessment support a number of ways forward for the co-op specific education and training landscape in Canada.

- The diversity of co-op specific educational opportunities (i.e. individual co-operatives, federations, learning institutions, apex organizations, and networks) are important to maintain and foster.
- Universities, colleges and learning institutions may continue to offer the current programming, but should also seize the opportunity to provide education and training programs in-house (in co-ops) by offering the services of content experts, adult educators and facilitators.
- Not unlike the Credit Union Development Achievement (CUDA) program, there is an opportunity to create tracked learning journeys for managers and directors in the non-financial co-operative sector.
- Formalize a system of peer to peer networking via co-op specific education or training.
- The opportunities for more sharing between co-ops, federations, learning institutions, and apex organizations abound.
 - Centralize shared services for co-op specific education and training.
 - Share training curriculum, facilitators, examples, best practices, hubs, and materials.

8 Hancock, E. and Brault, A. (2015). *The fifth principle in action: Mapping the co-operative educational Initiatives of Canadian co-operatives*. Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. University of Saskatchewan.

9 Fairbairn, B. (2016). *Postsecondary education about co-ops in Canada and the US: Hypothesis, data, action*. Presented at the Canadian Association for the Study of Co-operation. Calgary.

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