

Methodologies for Mining the Tacit Knowledge, Skills and Aptitudes of Housing Co-operatives Members

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Development of Methodology

- > Who we worked with: partners and participants
- > Methods
 - > Develop interview guide
 - > Test interview guide
 - > Focus group
 - > Conduct interviews
- > Lessons learned

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Who we worked with: Partners

- > Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT) highly engaged partner
 - > Member-supported organization representing more than 45,000 members living in over 160 non-profit housing co-ops across Toronto and York region
 - > Welcomed the research partnership
 - > Little time or energy to put towards research
 - > Actively searching for ways to improve co-op living including learning, training and education

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Who we worked with: Participants

- > Members of housing co-operatives from across the greater Toronto area
 - > Astonishing diversity in terms of income levels, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, etc.
 - > Recruited through CHFT, which helped to provide the validity, build trust

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Methods: Interview Guide

- > Determine Volunteer profile (demographic information)
- > Reasons for volunteering, reasons for moving into the co-op, different volunteer activities in the co-op, other volunteer activities
- > Question: What have you learnt through volunteering at your co-op?
- > Question: In what ways have you learnt through volunteering?

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Methods: Focus Group

- > With experienced co-op board and committee members
- > Highly engaged and invested in housing co-ops
- > Developed interview guide further to include questions about
 - > Transfer of knowledge
 - > Recognition of volunteer work
 - > Civic engagement levels
 - > Role volunteering plays in your life
 - > Levels of appreciation
 - > Goals for volunteering

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Methods: Pilot Interviews

- Start with open ended questions
- Develop list of things people have learnt (breadth)
- Develop list of ways of learning (breadth)
- Create mechanism for eliciting before and today
- Design scale to elicit intensity of learning (depth)

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Method: Interviews

- Ongoing additions to lists of what people learnt and how people learnt (total 32)
- Start seeing patterns and commonalities through peoples' stories
- Can ask appropriate probing questions to help members think about their learning
- Making explicit what is tacit
- Develop effective probing tools, questions and interview rhythm

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What we found: Limitations

- CHFT has no comprehensive demographic data
 - For co-op researchers working with memberships this could often be the case
- Self-assessments lack the rigour of more "objective" evaluations of learning conducted through pre and post tests
- Long and engaged process
- Open ended questions are not the best for drawing out members' learning (unless already warmed up)

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What we found: Benefits

- Self-assessments and members' reflections on their learning provide valuable data about the impact of their experiences in the housing co-operative
- Many respondents commented that they had not realized the breadth and depth of their learning from co-ops until the moment of the interview (Tacit)
- Preliminary work with CHFT helps to build trust, background, mutually beneficial goals

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Lessons Learned

- Process of layering and expanding methods builds deeper, more nuanced understanding
- Asking members for their stories helped to expand our understanding of why a change had occurred
- Good way to work with a diverse group, which is often the case of co-op membership

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