

**Role of Informal Learning in
Community Capacity Building of
Cooperative Housing Communities**

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Presented at the Association of
Cooperative Educators Institute
Alexandria, Virginia
August 3rd – 6th, 2005

Measuring Some Intangibles

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Purpose of Paper

- > The cooperative structure relies on the member's ability and willingness to learn
- > Explore ways in which informal learning serves as a mechanism for capacity building in housing cooperatives
- > Asked about intensity of learning and whether what was learned had changed since living in the cooperative

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Community Development

- Positive change in the social, economic, organizational, or physical structures of a community
- Improves both the welfare of community members and the community's ability to control its future
- Involves citizen-led efforts, carried out within or on behalf of a community, to:
 - Define problems,
 - Develop solutions, and
 - Attract the resources to implement activities

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Capacity Building

- The ability of individuals, organisations and communities to manage their own affairs and to work collectively to foster and sustain positive change (Howe and Cleary 2001)
- Accomplished through community development activities

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Informal Learning

- Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure
- It is not structured
- Typically does not lead to certification
- May be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or "incidental"/ random)
- Knowledge is mostly tacit: "all that i know but i cannot tell"

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Sources of Informal Learning

- Sources of Informal Learning include:
 - Face-to-face
 - Networking
 - Experiential ("by doing it")

"I think that all of these things listed here are really important. Many of which are structured and organized by either the co-op or the federation, but I also think that keeping your eyes open, being aware of what is going on in the co-op is a huge part of the process."

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What was Learned?

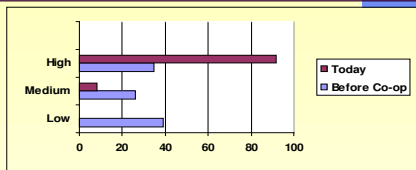
- Six categories
 - Self-governance: accountability, diplomacy
 - Cooperative management: regulations
 - Leadership: managerial, mentoring
 - Democratic attitudes and values: coop principles
 - Political efficacy: interest, self-esteem
 - Other competencies: instrumental in nature

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Self-governance



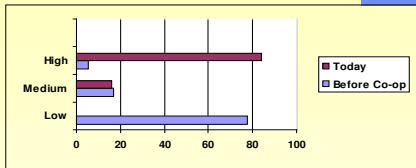
- One third reported having high self-governance skills when they started volunteering.
- Among the rest, 40% ranked themselves as low, and 25% as medium.
- Today, nine out of ten (92%) rated their current level of self-governance skills as high.

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Coop Management



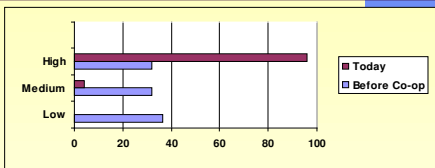
- Over three quarters (77%) stated that they had a low level of understanding and knowledge
 - 85% ranked themselves as high today.
- "Most people who come to the co-op have never been managers before, have never fired or hired staff, never been involved in repairs, etc. They don't have the people skills to be an employer. It is a great learning curve for everyone."

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Leadership



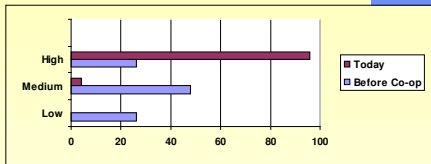
- 68 % started with low or medium leadership skills
- After participating in various co-op activities 96% ranked themselves as having high leadership skills.

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Democratic Attitudes and Values



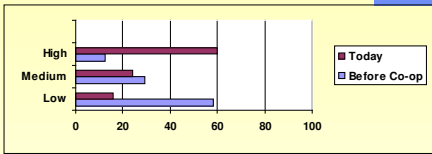
- Involvement in committees and boards played a key role in the acquisition and refinement of attitudes and values
 - Shift from self-interest to a concern for the common good.
- "There is no point having a co-op unless you can also be concerned about other people's welfare."

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Political Efficacy



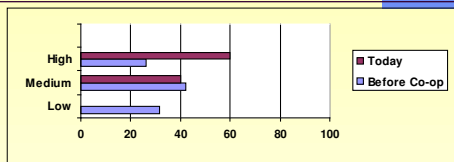
- Approx 60% reported having low political efficacy before
- Approx 60% ranked themselves with high political after
- Approx 40% perceived themselves as having either low (16%) or medium (24%) political efficacy today.
- Internal vs External political efficacy

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Other Competencies



- Often of an instrumental nature
- Skills and knowledge in areas like: finances and budgeting; office management and clerical skills; document writing and newsletter production; computer skills; gardening; language skills; and research skills.

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How did I learn? By screwing up. By making so many mistakes. By saying the wrong thing. By being blasted by the membership.... I learned by doing it: some of it right, lots of it wrong.

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Interpretation

- As aggregate data, informal learning opportunities are congruent with principles of capacity building
- A great deal of the informal learning acquired by housing coop members was tacit and unconscious
- Characteristic of the organizational and community culture of housing cooperatives
- Occurs naturally in cooperative settings

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Implications

- Incentives for member participation by focusing on what is gained
 - Broader definition of participation
 - Address the free rider problem
- Create activities to enhance the potential learning outcomes
- Initiate programs that will help the membership feel a sense of community determined by themselves
 - E.g. OWN housing co-operative develop policies supporting seniors

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