

Inserting the Social

L. Brown & E. Hicks (MSVU)

B. MacKinnon & T. Webb (Consumers' Community Co-operative)

A. LaPlante & M. Bourque (Co-op Atlantic)

Project # 16

Contact info: leslie.brown@msvu.ca

Date: May 1-2, 2008

Social Economy Centre



SOCIALECONOMY.UTORONTO.CA



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



Introduction

- ❑ Our project started with data from an earlier social cohesion research project begun in 2003 when Consumers' Community Co-operative (CCC) was a new co-op with 33 storefronts and over 10,000 member-shareholders
- ❑ In January 2008 CCC was dissolved and the storefronts are now managed by Co-op Atlantic. CCC shareholders are now shareholders in Co-op Atlantic

Evolution of Community Partner - CCC

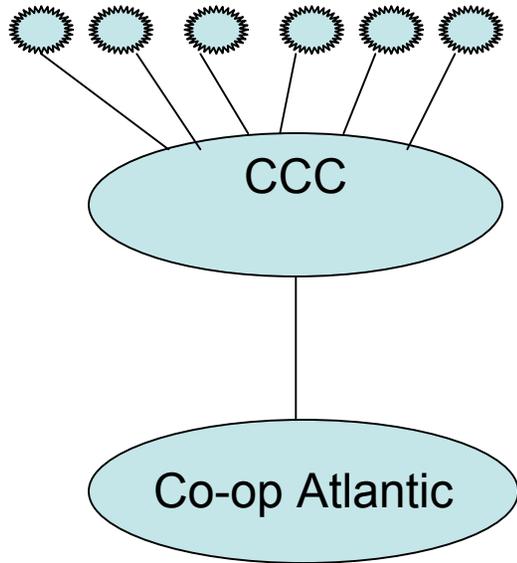
January 1, 2001



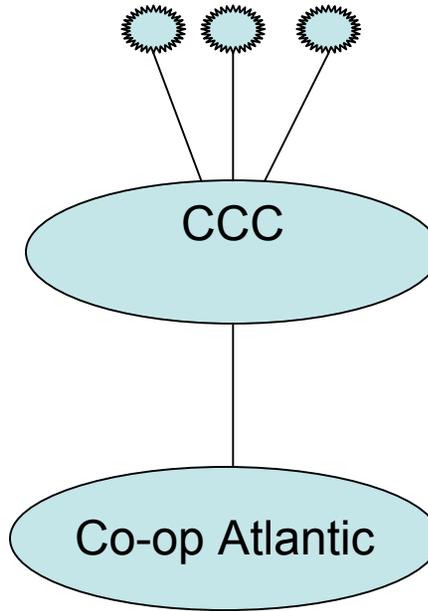
Spring 2007



January 2008

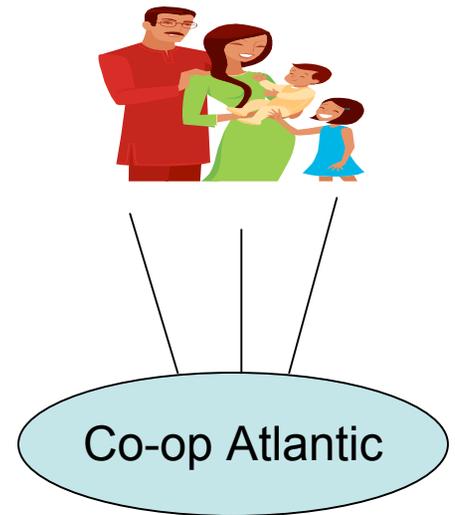


CCC created Jan. 1, 2001 out of a merger of Independent but struggling retail co-operatives with 33 store fronts. CCC was 1 of 128 member/shareholders of Co-op Atlantic



By spring 2007 16 storefronts remaining

2008 - CCC dissolved & CCC shareholders became Co-op Atlantic shareholders



Background and Rationale

- ❑ In 2005 CCC decided to partner in the Social Economy research because the Board believed that only by focusing on CCC's nature as a *co-operative business* could CCC turn itself around – they wanted a tool to inform strategic thinking and planning
- ❑ The academics wanted to address CCC's needs & contribute to the literature on social accounting & reporting, as well as to the literature on the “co-operative difference”

Project Methodology



Informant interviews

purposive sample:
N=28; (CCC board members; local council members, CCC managers, Co-op Atlantic managers)



Membership survey

Random sample
N=882; 26% response

Meeting observations

(3 AGMs; 2 zone meetings;
4 local council meetings)



**2005-2007 Working
with CCC building
on data collected
during previous
research
(quantitative &
qualitative)**

Document analysis

(minutes of interim board,
governance committee &
board meetings)



Role and participation of community partner



Main Findings: The “Co-operative Difference”

Be a good co-operative grocery store!

Stand for an alternative to other grocery stores

CCC member views on WHAT TO DO.

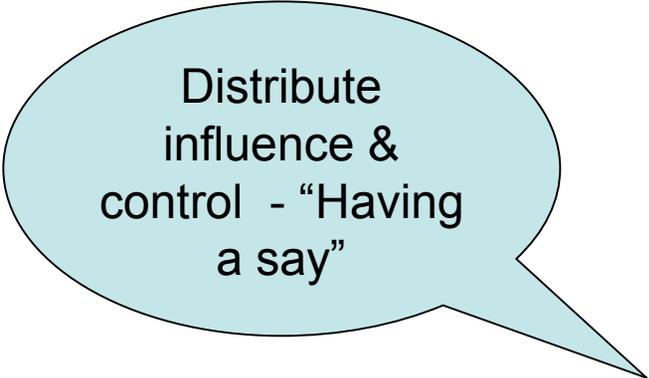
Be rooted in the community

Make membership meaningful!



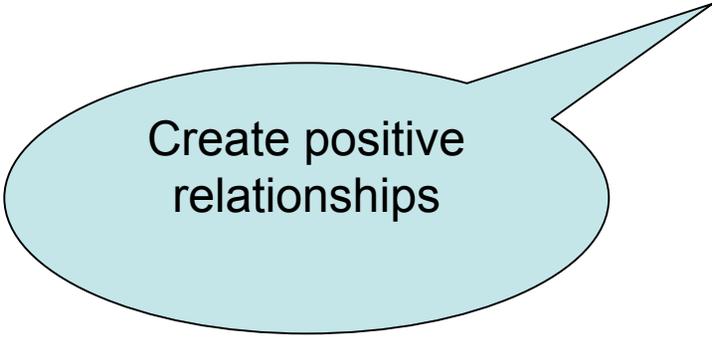
Main Findings / Deliverables

The “Co-operative Difference”

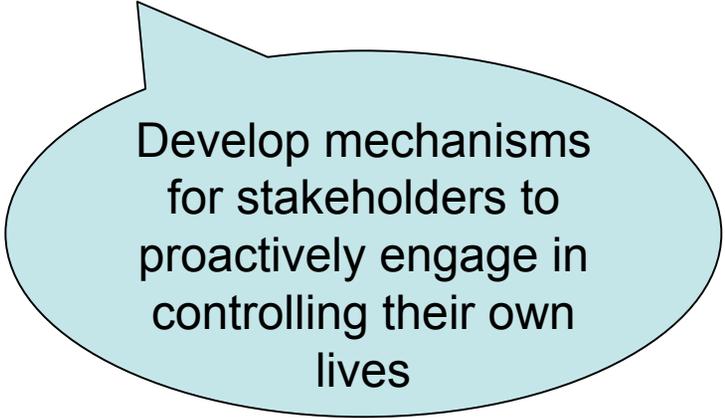


Distribute
influence &
control - “Having
a say”

**CCC leaders (management,
board & council members)
views on
HOW TO DO IT**



Create positive
relationships



Develop mechanisms
for stakeholders to
proactively engage in
controlling their own
lives

Conference papers: ICA 2006, CASC 2007, CIRIEC 2007 (submitted for publication) , ISTR 2008.

Main Findings/Deliverables

- We had intended to develop a social accounting tool – focusing on the intersection of what to do and how to do it, thus grounding the co-operative difference in a guide to action and providing a starting point for the development of indicators and measures to be validated with members
- The process of validating these with members was to have contributed both to the tool and to creating a “buzz” around the work, engaging members’ interest in their co-op
- Events overtook the research. CCC’s problems were severe enough, & tax considerations were important enough, that Co-op Atlantic intervened
- Future steps are uncertain – we may transform this into a similar project, working with Co-op Atlantic’s “Four Pillars of the Co-op Difference”

Implications for the Social Economy

- ❑ Social accounting and associated measurement issues are fundamental for the Social Economy
 - How are SE organizations to “present themselves” **to themselves and to others?**
 - How are they to prevent “goal displacement” or “mission drift”?
- ❑ SE organizations need social accounting tools useful for strategic planning, organizational monitoring and renewal, member education and recruitment ...

How Students Benefited from the Project

- ❑ 2004 – 2006. **Viola Winstanley**, Research Assistant for the cohesion project on which this work builds, contributed to the data collection and other aspects of the research. She is now a PhD student in Women's Studies at York University. She was funded by a previous SSHRC grant. She gained knowledge of the full range of research, including: substantive knowledge of co-operatives, social cohesion and social capital; implementation of collaborative research designs; Ethics applications and report writing for community partners; interviewing, data entry, SPSS data analysis...
- ❑ 2006 – 2007. **Amanda Horsman**, Funded by the SE grant. As our research Assistant she worked with the NVivo files, contributing significantly to the data analysis of the qualitative materials. She valued both the chance to work on a research project and the chance to learn NVivo, which she felt useful in her chosen career. She completed her library science master's degree and is now employed.

Conclusions and Next Steps

- ❑ We are preparing a paper for the upcoming ANSER meetings in Vancouver.
- ❑ Before then, we are presenting that paper to Co-op Atlantic, as part of our explorations of the possibilities of further research.