

# Ontario Small Business Centre's and Innovation Centre's Understanding of the Ontario Co-operative Association

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## **Introduction**

The following report is a follow up to the Ontario Co-operative Association Capstone Report. This report and the previous report are both written for the Ontario Co-operative Association by a student research team. The student research team is from the Public Service Graduate Certificate program at Conestoga College. This project was originally intended to be a capstone project, which is the culminating assignment for the Conestoga College Public Service Program. The capstone project tasks students to take what they have learned throughout the program and apply it practically to a major project. The first report was written in March 2020, just when COVID-19 broke. A few months after, in June 2020, an opportunity came to re-visit the project and continue to collect survey responses. The purpose of the project remains the same; to determine the familiarity of the co-operative model amongst employees of Small Business and Innovation Centres.

The Ontario Co-operative Association works both to support co-operative businesses with resources and guidance and promotes the co-operative business model within Ontario. Therefore, it is in the interest of the Ontario Co-operative Association to understand what takes place in the interactions between entrepreneurs and the support organizations available to them. One of these organizations is the Small Business Centre. There are fifty-four Small Business Centres across Ontario. The centres were created to offer tools and support to local business owners across Ontario (The Ontario Government, 2020). The services that are offered by these centres include: guidance from business consultants, workshops and seminars, information on patents, copyright and trademarks, mentoring and network opportunities, and guidance on licenses, permits, registration and regulations (The Ontario Government, 2020). The Small Business Centres are on the front line

of business creation and consequently have a lot of influence over the type of business model that business owners adopt.

Another influential organization within Ontario are the regional Innovation centres who support start-ups. There are only seventeen Innovation centres. Innovation centres provide entrepreneurs with access to capital, mentoring, peer networking programs, and market intelligence (Mentor Works, 2019). Due to the influence that employees at both Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres have over businesses decision making, the Ontario Co-operative Association seeks to determine the level of awareness of their employees in terms of the co-operative model. In addition, the organization is interested in determining whether these organizations have available resources on co-operatives to offer to the public. Their desire for insights into the innovation and business centres led the Ontario Co-operative Association to commission the Conestoga Public Service student research team to design and administer a survey to employees at these locations. This report will analyze the results of the survey carried out by the student research team, look at the methodology involved in the research, and consider some of the limitations of the research. The report will conclude with recommendations for potential future research teams pursuing this subject.

It is important to note that during the first phase in March only five survey responses were collected out of the fifty-four Small Business Centres across Ontario. The reason for this was because most business centres, like most municipal services, had to close because of the pandemic. During the second phase, we were able to survey nine more centres, which made for a total of fourteen survey responses. Twelve of them were Small Business Centres, while the remaining two were Innovation Centres. Operations continue to be partially suspended in many of the Small Business and Innovation Centres because of Covid, and staff that are continuing to work are doing so remotely

from home. Like the previous research analysis, the limited number of survey responses will reduce the credibility of the research because of the small population sample. As a consequence, many of our observations cannot be substantiated across a larger sample.

### **Research Methodology**

The research conducted for the Ontario Co-operative Association (OCA) utilized a telephone survey method. For the Ontario Co-operative Association telephone survey, it was intended to be a survey of fifty-four Small Business Centres (SBCs) and seventeen Innovation Centres. The purpose of the survey was to determine if there was a need for the resources and supports that the Ontario Co-operative Association offers in Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres. If all locations had been surveyed it would have resulted in a large sample size that could have been used to conduct quantitative research. However, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the sample size to fourteen respondents. This has resulted in a more qualitative than quantitative analysis which had been the original intent.

The survey employed both open and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to determine if the Small Business Centre surveyed had resources on co-operative businesses and whether participants would be interested in resources and support from the OCA. They were also used to discover the level of familiarity regarding the co-operative business model amongst the staff at the Small Business Centres. Open-ended questions were utilized to find out if employees could name a co-operative business in their community to test their familiarity with the model. Additionally, an open-ended question was included to understand what services about co-operative businesses were available at the participating business centre.

The data collected from the survey responses was entered into an excel file where all data was anonymized except the contact information for the Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres. The contact information is listed with confirmation from each of the centres that they would like the resources and supports available to them from the OCA and confirmation that they would be interested in the available support available from the OCA on business succession planning.

During the first phase of the Ontario Co-operative Association project, the research team decided to draft an email to the Small Business Centres across Ontario. The purpose of the email was to pre-arrange survey times for as many of the Small Business Centres as possible. The success of this approach was evident at the end of the project's first phase. All five of the survey responses from this phase resulted from the pre-arranged times for the research team to administer the survey. Realizing the effectiveness of the mass email, the research team sent a second mass email in June, first to the Small Business Centres, and then to the Innovation Centres. In total, the majority (twelve) of the successful survey completions came from emailing the innovation and business centre locations.

In addition to the emails, cold calls were conducted, using a previously created contact list, on at least three occasions to each Small Business Centre and Innovation Centre. The cold calling was not as successful as the emails because many employees at the innovation and Small Business Centres were still working from home, but it did lead to two successful survey responses.

### **The Co-operative Model in Ontario**

While the co-operative model has historically been popular in parts of Canada, such as the Prairies and Quebec, Ontario has not engaged with this model to the same extent. One of the reasons for the predominance of co-operatives in the prairies is that it has proven to be a profitable format in

agricultural businesses, accounting for 45% of revenue in 2011 for Canada's financial co-operatives (Mook et al., 2012). Ontario is a more densely populated province with less of a historical economic focus on agriculture. However, survey responses demonstrated that in rural Ontario communities such as Woodstock, both the employees and the clients of the business centres were familiar with the co-operative model. This is indicative of the larger overall trend in Canada of co-operative businesses dominating the agricultural sector and for this reason the co-operative model is more familiar in rural Canada. The co-operative business is well suited to rural parts of Canada due to the community-oriented nature of the model. It can provide services and resources that may be otherwise inaccessible due to a lack of commitment or interest from the private or public sectors (Geoby & Ronson, 2018). This fact is also exemplified in the finding that credit unions are more prevalent in rural areas across Canada than in densely populated areas (Mook et al., 2012).

Another reason that has been given for the disparity between Ontario and other provinces when it comes to co-operatives is that over the years, the provincial governments of Ontario have not created as many supports in the form of legislation and funding for co-operative businesses as their provincial counterparts (Heneberry & Laforest, 2011). In provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Saskatchewan, provincial governments have entered into agreements with their co-operative sectors to support the growth and development of co-operative (Heneberry & Laforest, 2011). The provinces that have strong traditions of co-operatives have successfully mobilized support from the government for the model (Heneberry & Laforest, 2011). Additionally, the existing legislation for co-operatives in Ontario was created in 1974 and has not been updated since (Fedeli & Walker, 2018). The lack of updates to the co-operative legislation

is evidence of how the Ontario government has neglected this business model and failed to consult co-operative businesses on whether the legislation is still working for them.

As Ontario moves into an economic recession triggered by COVID-19, the co-operative model has the potential to serve as a “market-fixer” by providing resources and services in parts of the province that may otherwise not have access to those resources and services. The resiliency of the co-operative model is particularly beneficial during recessions. This is due to the fact that the rate of survival for co-operatives starting up is better than their non co-operative counterparts, and co-operative businesses typically last longer, enabling businesses to survive periods of economic instability such as a recession (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009).

The research conducted in this analysis for the Ontario Co-operative Association demonstrates how the co-operative model continues to be undervalued and often unknown in the province of Ontario. Survey responses confirm that the government-mandated Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres have few resources on the co-operative model and according to employees, clients rarely inquire about the co-operative business approach. Consequently, organizations like the Ontario Co-operative Association will continue to play a significant role in promoting this business model so that it can become more widely known and understood for its potential benefits.

### **Survey Limitations**

This survey only reflects twelve out of fifty-four Small Business Centres and two out of seventeen Innovation Centres located across Ontario. Therefore, it should not be considered representative of the Small Business and Innovation Centres, but it instead offers perspective into what the experiences are at the Business and Innovation centres in terms of their understanding of co-operative businesses and the availability of resources.

This limitation is especially the case for the Innovation Centres from which only two responses were collected. The limited number of responses from the Innovation centres means that the Innovation Centres will be analyzed in conjunction with the Small Business Centres as opposed to separately. The small number of responses from the Innovation Centres was expected by the research team. This is due to the fact that a manager of the Waterloo Region Small Business Centres informed a student researcher that in their opinion the survey would not get much interest from the Innovation Centres. One Innovation Centre, Innovate Niagara, declined the email requesting participation in the survey. In addition, the Timmins Innovation Centre was the only location of the fourteen that responded that it does not want the resources and supports offered by the Ontario Co-operative Association. One of the Innovation Centres also mentioned that a Small Business Centre located nearby would be the better place than the Innovation Centre for resources on co-operatives to be sent to. These findings make the case that while the Innovation Centres may need what the Ontario Co-operative Association has to offer there was not the same interest in the survey as there was for the Small Business Centres.

In addition, one of the limitations of this survey is that it used the term “co-operative businesses” as opposed to “social enterprises” which according to the OCA’s Director, Peter Cameron, is a term that is increasingly being used interchangeably with co-operative businesses. Peter Cameron also informed the research team that people today use and are familiar with the term “social enterprise”. A consequence of this is that the survey doesn’t account for the number of people who refer to “social enterprise” as opposed to “co-operative business” when they visit the Small Business Centres seeking assistance and resources. This was confirmed when speaking with one survey respondent who agreed that “social enterprise” was what they typically heard from clients during their experiences working in the Small Business Centre. In addition, survey

respondents could also be more familiar with the term “social enterprise”, so their knowledge of co-operative businesses could be greater than what the survey reflects because of the choice of terminology.

Another limitation to this survey that should be taken into consideration is the fact that almost all respondents who participated in the survey were in leadership roles at the Small Business Centres. The reason that this occurred was that the mass email sent to business centres and Innovation Centres across Ontario was sent to contact emails available for the centres which typically was that of a manager or coordinator of the centres. Therefore, none of the survey results on co-operative knowledge indicate what the knowledge of co-operatives would be for a more junior staff member in a business centre. Those in leadership and management of the Small Business Centres would likely have more experience and knowledge of businesses than would their staff at the centres. This could account for the average level of familiarity with co-operatives amongst participants being a five on a scale from one being completely unfamiliar and ten being well versed. Potentially, if survey participants had comprised of people in different roles the average familiarity with co-operatives would have been skewed lower.

In addition, the open-ended nature of the survey questions made it challenging to interpret the data. Questions such as “approximately how many inquiries related to co-operative businesses do you get a month?” led to a multitude of responses with different time periods such as under-five a month and three a year. While the open-ended questions allowed for more dialogue from respondents it made it difficult to interpret the data and to find correlations.

### **Opportunities at Small Business and Innovation Centres for Resources and Supports**

The aim of the survey conducted for the Ontario Co-operative Association is to determine if there is a need for resources and supports about the co-operative model at Small Business

Centres across Ontario. This involved looking at what the current available resources are at the business centers in terms of co-operatives as well as the level of demand for co-operative information at the centres and the knowledge that staff have in terms of co-operatives. This section of the analysis will examine survey responses with the aim of drawing a conclusion as to whether there is a need amongst Small Business Centres for the services and supports that the Ontario Co-operative Association is offering.

#### Small Business and Innovation Centre employee familiarity with the co-operative model

One of the questions posed to survey participants was a scale on which they could rate their familiarity with the co-operative model. The scale started at one which was designated as completely unfamiliar and ten was designated as well versed. The average amongst the fourteen participants was 5.2 with knowledge of the model being across the board for participants. Three survey participants rated themselves at eight, three put themselves at a five and another three put themselves at the bottom of the scale with one, two, and three. One of the respondents who gave themselves an eight informed the student researcher that their familiarity was related to their personal life experience and not related to any training provided to Small Business Centres. What is deduced from the survey results provided by the fourteen locations is that there is no consistency when it comes to the level of knowledge in regard to co-operatives at the Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres. This means that the level of service the public receives inquiring about the model will vary between locations, and even potentially staff at the same location, and as a consequence it could discourage those at locations where staff are unfamiliar from further investigating this category of business. Interestingly, the varying levels of comprehension on co-operative businesses between the SBCs and Innovation Centres did not appear to play any role in terms of the services provided relating to co-operative businesses. The

locations that had employees with high levels of familiarity had just as few services for co-operatives as the locations with lower levels of familiarity.

The survey results also indicated that there was variation in the resources currently used at Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres to familiarize employees with co-operative businesses. In response to the survey question “Would you be comfortable naming sources that you have used to learn about co-operative businesses?” only four participants listed the Ontario Co-operative Association as a current source for their learning on co-operatives. In addition, one participant of the twelve mentioned that they were not aware of the OCA prior to the survey. Other responses included personal research using search drives such as Google, and two participants used Social Enterprise Network of Central Ontario to learn about co-operatives. Four of the fourteen participants in the survey were unable to name resources that they used to learn about co-operatives. However, it should be noted that four of the fourteen Small Business and Innovation Centres referenced the Ontario Co-operative Association as a source they have used to learn about co-operative businesses.

#### Current Available Resources on Co-operatives at Business and Innovation Centres

Accompanying the question of what sources on co-operatives are used by employees at Small Business Centres, the survey also asked, “Are resources available about co-operative businesses?” The survey responses included six employees who said no, two employees who said yes, two others who responded I don’t know, or I can’t remember, and four who said they help clients by researching the resources online. The fact that the majority of respondents said “no” further exemplifies how co-operative businesses are a neglected area of business in Small Business Centres. Furthermore, observations of the OCA resources on co-operatives at the Waterloo Small Business Centre led to the discovery that the resources dated from 2013 or

earlier. These resources were confirmed as outdated by the project OCA contact Peter Cameron who said that updated materials had been created since. These survey results are evidence that there is not only a need for updated resources on co-operatives, but that the OCA could provide very valuable assistance so that employees need not rely on their own research.

The other survey question that was asked was what resources were provided about co-operative businesses at Small Business and Innovation Centres. In response to the question, “What services are currently available related to co-operative businesses?”, seven out of fourteen locations admitted to not having any available services on co-operative businesses, three locations offer business coaching and one-on-one consultation according to the survey participant, and four locations referred interested members of the public to Georgian College’s Social Enterprise Network of Central Ontario, or they would offer to assist with research. Similar to the seven locations that did not have services, the Waterloo Small Business Centre informed the student researcher that the last service they had offered for co-operative businesses was a workshop three years ago.

What the responses demonstrate is that there are not sufficient resources or services on co-operatives at the Small Business Centres. If the Small Business Centre employees do not have access to resources for learning about co-operatives, then it means that they are not well equipped for advising members of the public about co-operative businesses. The consequence of this is that members of the public may not get the support or information they need to create or develop a co-operative business. The lack of services available at Small Business Centres on co-operatives may suggest to some that the demand is not sufficient to put resources into offering these services. The demand for co-operative resources and supports will be further explored in the section below. Another takeaway from the survey responses is that the Ontario Co-operative

Association faces a hurdle in that it is not known in some of the Small Business Centres in Ontario. If employees at Small Business Centres are unaware of the OCA, they will not be able to refer businesses to the organization if further assistance is needed for the business.

#### Demand for resources and services

Another focus of the survey was to find out the level of demand for resources on co-operative businesses. Before conducting the survey, a visit was made to the Waterloo Small Business Centre. During this visit, the employee of the centre informed the student researcher that co-operative businesses were rarely if ever asked about by clients visiting the Centre. This answer differed amongst employees at other locations who in response to the question “Approximately how many inquiries related to co-operative businesses do you get a month”, responded with varying numbers with the least being none at all and the most being under five a month. The employee at the Woodstock location was among the six locations that reported the most interest: they informed the student researcher that a lot of people would come in inquiring about social enterprises not realizing that they were indeed interested in the co-operative business model, another six said while two others said sometimes or occasionally. The observation made by the employee at Woodstock that clients often spoke about social enterprise could be the case in other locations and thereby impact the numbers that survey respondents reported for inquiries about co-operatives. If people are using the terms “co-operative” and “social enterprise” interchangeably, it creates an obstacle for capturing accurate data on the Small Business Centres. Future research projects can mitigate this obstacle by using both terms in the survey or including a survey question that relates to the use of the term “social enterprise” in their Small Business Centre location.

In addition, one insight brought up by a survey participant was that being located in close proximity to agricultural businesses means that they get a healthy amount of interest in regard to the co-operative model. This is consistent with Peter Cameron's observation that the co-operative model is better known in rural parts of Ontario because of its prevalence in the agricultural sector. While there is not sufficient data to confirm that rurally located Small Business Centres have more interest from the public when it comes to co-operatives, it does indicate that each Business Centre is unique and differs based on the clientele and the environment they are in. The fact that Ontario's Small Business Centres are ill equipped in terms of information about co-operatives is evidence of how this model is not valued in the same way as other models in Ontario.

### **Interest in the Ontario Co-operative Association's Supports and Resources**

The survey's main objective was to determine if the Small Business Centres felt there was a need for the support and resources available at the Ontario Co-operative Association. This part of the survey had two components. The first question is about succession planning, which applies to all businesses but has proven to be important for co-operatives for reasons explored below. The other question that was posed to employees of the centres was "The Ontario Co-operative Association is seeking opportunities to provide resources to the community, can the Ontario Co-operative Association Support your organization?" This question was straightforward and intended to get a sense of the interest amongst Small Business Centres about a partnership with the OCA. Thirteen of the fourteen participants answered yes while one participant said no.

### **Succession Planning**

One of the components of the survey conducted for the Ontario Co-operative Association was to determine Small Business Centre's interest in support for succession planning. Succession

planning in the context of business is “any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of a business by providing for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people” (Rothwell, 2015). When it comes to co-operative businesses, succession planning can help to ensure the sustainability of the business over the years (Ontario Co-operative Association, 2018). One of the risks to a business without succession planning is that it could stop being competitive and in turn not be successful in attracting qualified, talented individuals to lead the business (Ontario Co-operative Association, 2018). Additionally, the democratic and grassroots nature of co-operative businesses would likely mean that more people and local communities would be impacted by a co-operative business closing.

The Small Business Enterprise Centres across Ontario are mandated to assist small businesses with starting and growing their businesses (The Government of Ontario, 2020). Therefore, a service such as succession planning would fit within this mandate because it would help retiring business owners with processes that can be complicated and confusing for people.

Of the fourteen enterprise centres and Innovation Centres that responded to the question “Is there an opportunity for the centre to offer information about business succession plans?”, thirteen locations expressed interest in information about business succession plans and one in particular requested webinar material on business succession plan from the OCA. One location was not interested. However, this interest is not reflective of all business centres because during conversations with the Waterloo Small Business Centre, an employee of that location said that they refuse to offer succession planning supports because they felt it was a very personal thing and that this function could be fulfilled elsewhere. In addition, one respondent to the survey agreed to the provision of resources for succession planning from the OCA but did mention that they weren’t sure it was necessary because demand for the service was minimal. One of the

potential reasons for demand for these services being minimal at some locations is that people typically refer to legal or financial advisors for assistance with business succession planning (Sun Life Financial, 2011). However, these services can be costly, and it would be beneficial to the public if succession planning resources and supports were more accessible.

#### Small Business Centre's and Innovation Centres interested in partnering with the OCA

The final survey question asked employees of the Small Business Centres whether they would be interested in the assistance that the OCA can offer on co-operative businesses. The responses to this question was almost entirely uniform; everyone agreed to the assistance offered by the OCA except for one Innovation Centre, and their explanation was that it was because they are an Innovation Centre. They did however feel that the OCA could be very helpful to Small Business Centres. They further said that if they received such resources, they would be glad to forward it to the employees at the Small Business Centre. This consensus as to the value of the Ontario Co-operative Association's support would likely have been different if survey participants had not all emailed and arranged for a survey appointment time. Respondents' early consent to the survey via email signaled interest in principle with a connection with the OCA because the email sent to Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres highlighted the intent of the survey in determining the level of need resources and supports. The unanimous consent suggests that there is a desire amongst Small Business Centres to improve the provision of resources and services related to the co-operative model. While the survey made it evident that co-operatives are often neglected in Small Business Centres, the level of interest in OCA assistance shows that there is a desire for change. Moreover, student researchers heard from survey participants that they were eager to connect and create a partnership with the association. One participant even requested an immediate introduction to Peter Cameron so that they could prepare their centre for expected

growth in their community, and another participant specifically requested resources and materials for webinars, mentioning they have organized up to thirty webinars in the year 2020.

### Survey Rejections

While there were many positive responses to the survey, there were a minority of locations that rejected the survey. In total two of the fifty-four Small Business Centres communicated that they were not interested in the survey. One Small Business Centre location emailed, giving the reason that their schedule was too busy to accommodate the survey. The other location also emailed the student research team but not give a reason for its rejection of the survey. A third Small Business Centre informed the research team via email that they do not have any contact with co-operatives. The employee's dismissal of the survey because they believed they didn't have contact with co-operatives response makes evident that co-operatives are not prioritized in some Small Business Centres. If the employee doesn't believe they have encountered co-operatives that means that they aren't discussing this model with new business owners starting out. Once again, this shows that organizations such as the Ontario Co-operative Association have a significant role to play in raising awareness of this business model.

As mentioned earlier in the report, one Innovation Centre rejected the survey responding by email that they were not interested. No reason was given by the location for refusing the survey.

### **Recommendations for future student projects**

In reflecting upon this project there are several recommendations that student researchers would make if student teams pursue this project in the future.

The first recommendation would be to send a mass email to all Small Business Centres informing them of the purpose of the survey as well as providing an opportunity for the centres to arrange a time for the survey. This proved to be the most successful measure that student

researchers put into place during this project. Almost all fourteen of the participating locations resulted from contact made via the Small Business Centres director/manager. It should be noted that this action makes it more likely that leadership from the Small Business Centres are participating in the surveys rather than a full spectrum of employees in different positions. However, reaching out to the centres made them more amenable to participating because they could arrange the survey to be conducted at a time and date of their choosing. It also provided flexibility for the Small Business Centres in that the centres could decide who would be participating in the survey and they could take into account who would be most appropriate for it.

In addition, another recommendation is for a visit to a local Small Business Centre once covid conditions permit. The OCA project contact, Peter Cameron, suggested this to student researchers during their preliminary stages and it proved to be highly useful. The visit proved to be valuable for allowing student researchers to understand the daily functions of the Small Business Centres as well as what resources and supports are at hand. It also was a good opportunity to bring to the OCA some samples of resources available at Small Business Centres on co-operatives which led to the discovery of the outdated materials. The staff at the Small Business Centres visited during this research project helped to clarify the differences between the Small Business Centres and Innovation Centres. They helped those working on the project to know what to expect, such as the fact that Innovation Centres would likely be less interested in this project because of their prioritization on incubating businesses as opposed to the provision of resources and supports to small businesses.

We also recommend that future student projects have a firm grasp of concepts referenced throughout the survey and about the Small Business Centres themselves and their functions.

Terminology such as business succession planning can be challenging to explain or discuss but being versed in the language used helps to lend credibility to the research project. During this research experience both during the first phase and second phase, survey participants responded positively when student participants demonstrated an awareness of the context surrounding the survey such as the prevalence of the term “social enterprise”. Another measure that proved beneficial was recognizing that all Small Business Centres operate differently depending on their management and to whom they are directly accountable, whether it is a municipality or a regional governing body.

Additionally, in the survey content, a future recommendation would be to include the term “social enterprise” along with “co-operative” to reflect how these terms are being used interchangeably. By taking this step it will ensure a fuller picture of the extent of the demand for resources and supports on co-operatives as well as the familiarity with the model for employees. This point is reinforced by the fact that one respondent mentioned that there is a tendency at their location for “co-operatives” to be referenced as “social enterprises”. Another example of this interchangeability between the two terms is the fact that the main support identified by one Small Business Centre for the co-operative model is a Georgian College organization called the Social Enterprise Network.

Another suggestion we would make for those conducting a survey like this in the future is to make contact with Small Business Centres in the morning as opposed to the afternoon. The Waterloo Small Business Centre informed the research team that the mornings were typically the best time to call Small Business Centres because workshops tended to be organized in the afternoons and fewer people visit for business coaching in the mornings. This corresponds with the times that were selected by the Small Business Centre employees when they were arranging

times for the survey to be administered. Nine out of fourteen participants chose a morning time period for contact, between nine and eleven, while the other five were conducted during afternoon and could be traced to the fact that people were working from home at that period.

### **Research Conclusions**

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from this project is that there are not sufficient resources or supports available on the co-operative model at Small Business Centres in Ontario. There are a number of reasons this could be the case, including a lack of demand from the public, or perhaps a lack of awareness. This was demonstrated by the fact that six out of fourteen respondents had less than one inquiry a month about the co-operative model. This finding is also backed up by the Waterloo Small Business Centre, Renfrew County and Pembroke Small Business Centre, Lambton Small Business Centre, and others who said that they never had requests about the co-operative approach to business. Another factor that could be to blame for Ontario Small Business Centre's being ill-equipped when it comes to the co-operative model is that the model has not been as prevalent in the province of Ontario than it has elsewhere in Canada, like the Prairies and Quebec. This fact is conveyed by the number of co-operative businesses reported per province in 2013. In 2013 Quebec had a total of 2,464 reporting co-operatives while Ontario the most populous province in Canada had 782, a number close to Saskatchewan's 582 (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2013). If the public is not as familiar with the model, then they do not know to inquire about it, and this in turn creates a self-fulfilling prophecy leading the Small Business Centres to not invest in procuring information on the model because they feel that there is no demand. However, it should be noted that thirteen of fourteen locations consented to the OCA's assistance in the provision of resources and supports on co-operative businesses. So, there is proof that Ontario's

Small Business Centres recognize a need and want to correct the deficiency in co-operative resources.

In addition, the profile of the co-operative model will never be increased in Ontario if those who are working with the public are not familiar with co-operative businesses. The fact that four out of twelve participants could not name resources they use for learning about co-operatives indicates that the Small Business Centres are not being trained or equipped appropriately to introduce and advocate for the model to the public. Another sign of the lack of familiarity with the co-operative structure is that four out of twelve locations surveyed could not name or identify a local co-operative. Furthermore, the survey finding that knowledge of the model really varies between completely unfamiliar and well-versed points to an unevenness in the resource provisions of the Small Business Centres.

When it comes to business succession planning, despite some staff misgivings about the personal nature of the service, our finding was that amongst the Small Business Centres there is a need for and interest in this service. The responses to this component of the survey did vary; we had one participant inform us that business succession planning is becoming more important in their rural agricultural area and another participant said that they were unsure if the service would be necessary due to lack of demand. This could be another area where geographical location or other factors are responsible for variations, but due to the small sample size there is not enough data to prove that geography or region has an impact.

The general consensus upon concluding this research project is that the Small Business Centres need more resources on co-operative businesses, and they need updates to the available information that they have. It also became clear that there is a lot of variation when it comes to knowledge of the co-operative model at the Small Business Centres. Unfortunately, there also

seems to be variation in just how much leadership in the Small Business Centre are familiar with the Ontario Co-operative Association with some admitting to being unaware of the organization. The Ontario Co-operative Associations resources would help to bridge this gap in knowledge between the centres as well as improve employee's confidence in their knowledge of the co-operative model. If Small Business Centre employees can speak confidently about the model, then more members of the public can learn about this option and get the resources that they need. It is evident from this research project that there is a need for the Ontario Co-operative Association and what it has to offer such as guidance on succession planning.

## **Draft Survey Debriefing**

Study Debriefing for Participation in the Ontario Co-operative Association Capstone Project

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Thank you for your participation in this collaborative study conducted by student researchers in the Public Service Program at Conestoga College on behalf of the Ontario Co-operative Association. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

### Purpose of the Study:

We previously informed you that the purpose of the study was to identify whether there is a need amongst Small Business and Innovation Centres in Ontario for resources and supports on the co-operative business model. The purpose was also to determine which Ontario Small Business Centres would be interested in supports from the Ontario Co-operative Association in terms of the provision of resources applicable to the co-operative model.

### Confidentiality:

All data obtained from the survey will be destroyed by May 2020. No names have been used in the study. The only information used is the Small Business or Innovation Centre's preferred contact name and email, collected for the purpose of directing communications from the Ontario Co-operative Association to the chosen contact of the Small Business Centre.

If you have any concerns or comments about the survey feel free to contact the Public Service Program Coordinator Dr. Piscitelli via telephone number 519-998-3917 or the chair of Conestoga's Research and Ethics Board at the email [rebchair@conestogac.on.ca](mailto:rebchair@conestogac.on.ca).

### Findings:

Some main findings of this telephone survey include;

- The average familiarity rating with the co-operative model amongst study participants is 5.2 on a scale of 1 being completely unfamiliar and 10 being well versed.
- 92.8% of the fourteen-participating Small Business Centres and Innovation centres felt there was an opportunity at their location to offer information about business succession plans.
- 60% of respondents from the fourteen-participating business centres said there was none to very few resources on the co-operative business model at their location.
- The frequency of inquiries about the co-operative business model in Small Business Centres according to those surveyed varied from under five a month to none at all.
- In response to the question “Have you had clients come in with questions related to co-operatives?” 40% of the five locations participating said yes.
- 99.9% of the five respondents agreed to support from the Ontario Co-operative Association.

Further Information:

If you would like to learn more about the co-operative business model or the Ontario Co-operative Association please visit the OCA’s website <https://ontario.coop/> or call their number 519-763-8271. You can also visit the site of the National Chapter on Co-operatives, Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada at <https://canada.coop/> or call 613-238-6712.

**\*\*\*Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Once again, thank you for your participation in this study.\*\*\***

**Final Ethics Approved Script**

**Ontario Co-operative Association Capstone Project Telephone Script**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am calling on behalf of the Conestoga College Public Service Program and the Ontario Co-operative Association. Do you have some time for a brief survey?

**Yes-** Continue with survey

**No-** Thank you for your time today, is there a time that would be appropriate to call another day?

Before I can begin the survey, I am required to read a brief ethics statement to confirm you understand the risks and benefits of the survey.

This survey will be conducted by myself \_\_\_\_\_Jennifer Peers\_\_\_ a student researcher from Conestoga College. The data will then be stored on the laptop of Jennifer Peers' the projects coordinator and a backup USB stick in a password protected file. Your name and contact information will not be kept with your interviewer data. All data will be destroyed by May 2020.

We are collaborating on this project with the Ontario Co-operative Association and working under the direction of Dr. Anthony Piscitelli. We would like to ask a few questions about the co-operative business model.

The purpose of this survey will be to determine if there is a need for the Ontario Co-operative Association to provide their resources and expertise to small business enterprise centres on the co-operative business model. You will not be directly quoted in your survey results just your general answer will be recorded. Your data will be used to prepare a report for the Ontario Co-operative Association and a presentation, which will be given to other student in the Conestoga College Public Service Program. A summary report will also be mailed to all fifty-four small business centres contacted to participate in this survey.

The risk of this telephone survey will be minimal and limited to the potential for participants to feel self-conscious and some embarrassment about their knowledge of the co-operative model. If at any point you feel uncomfortable with the survey you may end the survey and we will destroy your data.

The survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. There will be no compensation for taking part in the survey. You may benefit by learning a bit about the co-operative business model during the survey and you will be helping the Ontario Co-operative Centre design more effective training.

The project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the REB and those participants who have concerns or questions about their involvement in the project may contact the Chair at [rebchair@conestogac.on.ca](mailto:rebchair@conestogac.on.ca) or Dr. Anthony Piscitelli at 519-998-3917. Would you like me to repeat that contact information for you to record it?

Yes – Repeat contact information from previous paragraph

No – Continue to the next part of the survey

Before we start, I just wanted to inform you that this survey is confidential and anonymous. You can withdraw from the survey at any point and upon withdrawal your survey responses will be destroyed. Do you consent to the use of your survey answers by the Ontario Co-operative Association?

Yes- Continue with survey

No- Thank you for your time, have yourself a great evening/afternoon.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being completely unfamiliar and 10 being well versed) how would you rate your familiarity with the co-operative business model?
2. Is there a co-operative business that comes to mind in your local or national community?
3. Would you be comfortable naming some sources you have used or would refer people to for learning about co-operative businesses?
4. What services are currently available related to co-operative businesses at your centre?
5. Have you had clients come in with questions related to co-operatives?

Answers

If **No** continue to question #7, if **Yes** continue to question #6

6. Approximately how many inquiries related to co-operative businesses do you get a month?
7. What resources, if any, are available on co-operative businesses at your centre?

8. The Ontario Co-operative Association offers supports for soon to be retiring business owners in terms of the creation of succession plans. Is there an opportunity in the centre to offer information about business succession plans?
9. The Ontario Co-operative Association is seeking opportunities to provide resources to the community can the Ontario Co-operative Association Support your organization?
10. Can you confirm for the purposes of sending resources that \_\_\_\_\_ is an appropriate contact to send resources to and can they still be reached at \_\_\_\_\_. [Note this contact information will be recorded on a separate sheet of paper].

Are there any questions about the survey?

Thank you so much for your time, we appreciate your feedback.

The results of the survey will be debriefed to all participating innovation and business centres via mail. This survey is anonymous and confidential so no personal information will be used with the exception of the confirmed contact information for the centre location. The Ontario Co-operative Association will also be in contact with centres who request resources or support.

If you have any additional questions please feel free to reach out to our professor Dr. Anthony Piscitelli at 519-998-3917.

Thank you again, we appreciate your assistance especially during a challenging time such as this.

## Data

<b>Small Business Centre and Innovation Centre Data</b>				
<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Q5</b>
5	Mustard Seed Co-operative	The Ontario Co-operative Association	Business coaching, OCA fact sheet, comparison worksheet.	Yes, a few
3	Nothing Specific	Georgian College Social Enterprise Network Co-operative	Refer them to Georgian College Social Enterprise Network Co-operative	Yes, sometimes
8	Nothing Specific	Google and reach out to Mustard Seed Co-operative	We would like to offer more resources than currently available	Only occasionally
2	Credit Unions	I haven't used any resources	Don't currently offer services on co-operatives	No
8	Hydro Energy Corp	I don't remember using any particular services	Nothing except through entrepreneurship	Yes
5	Libra Finance	Libra Credit Union	Almost everything including business planning, preparing documents for loans and security	No
8	Home Hardware, Co-operators Insurance	Pillars, Social Enterprise Network of Ontario	Very limited, business consultation, advice for starters	Yes

			and a referral to SENCO if they are attracted to that model	
6	Agricultural	No	There are many programs for entrepreneurs	Yes, one in six years
1	Yes-business not named	The Ontario Co-operative Association	Not really familiar, not seen often	
5	Yes-business not named	Co-operatives in Co-op, Entrepreneurship in Kitchener-Waterloo	None	No
2	Val Gagne Farming Co-operative and La Caisse Populaire	Community Development Centres don't have resources	Nothing	Yes
7	Co-op Artiste	Nobody has asked in years about them	Conduct research to help them find resources or refer them	No
6	Yes-business not named	They are referred to the Ontario Co-operative Association	Give a general consultation, assessment and refer them to the Ontario Co-operative Association	Yes
7	Yes, credit unions	The Ontario Co-operative Association	General One-on-One Consultations on the co-operative business model	Not often



<b>Small Business Centre and Innovation Centre Data</b>			
<b>Q6</b>	<b>Q7</b>	<b>Q8</b>	<b>Q9</b>
1 every 2 months	Yes, fact sheets	Yes	Yes
Under 5 a month	None to very limited	Yes	Yes
2 a month	Nothing Specific	Yes, there is a significant demand	Yes
None	No physical resources, just research conducted themselves	Yes, we have minimal resources on this	Yes
3 a year	I don't know	Yes, but not sure if it is necessary	Yes
None	No	Yes	Yes
Not often, a few a year	None	Yes	Yes
1 in 6 years	Can't think of any	Yes, interested in online training, seminars, workshop and other resources	Yes
None	Research co-operatives on the internet with the client	Yes	Yes
Not 1 in a month	Will check with the program manager	Yes	Yes
None	Sections from a website that supports not-for-profit social enterprise	No	Yes
None	None	Yes, have organized about 30 webinars this year (2020)	Yes

Every other month	We assist clients with research or refer them to other location	Yes	No
Not 1 in a month, less than 10 in a year	Print outs on Co-operatives and the Co-operative Structure provided by the OCA	Yes	Yes

## **Small Business Centres interested in OCA Support**

**Location:** Barrie

**Contact:** Briar Kelly **Contact Email:** Briar.Kelly@Barrie.ca

**Location:** Woodstock-Oxford County

**Contact:** Ramona Gallagher **Contact Email:** rgallagher@cityofwoodstock.ca

**Location:** Renfrew County and Pembroke SBCs

**Contact:** Colleen Sadler **Contact Email:** csadler@countyofrenfrew.on.ca

**Location:** Huron County SBC

**Contact:** Patrick Donnelly **Contact Email:** pdonnelly@huroncountry.ca

**Location:** Lambton SBC

**Contact:** Fraser Parry **Contact Email:** [parry@sarnialambton.on.ca](mailto:parry@sarnialambton.on.ca)

**Location:** Orangeville SBC

**Contact:** Ellen Sinclair **Contact Email:** [Esinclair@orangeville.ca](mailto:Esinclair@orangeville.ca)

**Location:** Sudbury SBC

**Contact:** Josee Pharand **Contact Email:** [Josee.Pharand@greatersudbury.ca](mailto:Josee.Pharand@greatersudbury.ca)

**Location:** Guelph Innovation centre

**Contact:** Diana Train **Contact Email:** [diana.train@innovationguelph.ca](mailto:diana.train@innovationguelph.ca)

**Location:** Durham County SBC

**Contact:** Teresa Shaver **Contact Email:** tshaver@bacd.ca

**Location:** Cornwall SBC

**Contact:** Candy Pollard **Contact Email:** [cpollard@cornwall.ca](mailto:cpollard@cornwall.ca)

**Location:** Grey County SBC

**Contact:** Courtney Miller **Contact Email:** Courtney.miller@grey.ca

**Location:** Niagara Falls SBC Location

**Contact:** Dean Spironello **Contact Email:** [dspironello@niagrafalls.ca](mailto:dspironello@niagrafalls.ca)

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