

**Informal and Non-formal learning in Non-profit Organizations<sup>i</sup>**

**by**

**Jorge Sousa and Jack Quarter**

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## **Introduction**

Non-profit organizations have increasingly taken on a more active role in providing a variety of services to either the general public or to a membership (Quarter, Richmond, Sousa and Thompson 2001). In general, the operations of these organizations are maintained by a combination of employees and volunteers. Although those employees and volunteers may possess valuable experience, they often take advantage of resources provided within the organization in a less formal way than that found in an education facility. These resources can enable them to maintain their skill set or to upgrade other skills. The question is what those resources are and what form of learning takes place within those organizations? Furthermore, what is the relationship of the presence of the resources to the type of learning occurring with the organization?

In this study we explore two questions. First, what is the predominant type of learning that occurs within a non-profit organization? The second question explores the available resources associated with the organization that promote the predominant type of learning process?

## **Types of Learning**

The concept of learning is often described as the acquiring new knowledge. Using this definition, many can state that they learn every day of their lives. However, the conditions and context under which learning takes place is a much more elusive concept. Livingstone (1999; 2001) and Selman and Dampier (1991) state that learning occurs along three dimensions: formal, non-formal (or further education), and informal. While the first two types of learning are deceptively simple to identify in organizations, informal learning is a much more ambiguous concept. For the purposes of

this study we will be using non-formal and informal forms of learning. Several researchers suggest that non-formal and informal learning occur within a variety of situations and the situation helps to characterize the type of learning process which is predominant within an organization (Colley, Hodkinson, and Malcolm 2002; Prom-Jackson, Palmisano, Jackson, Kategile, Novojilov, and Malone 2002). According to the European Commission (2001) statement on lifelong learning, non-formal and informal learning can be defined in the following way:

**Non-formal learning:** learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

**Informal learning:** learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or "incidental"/ random).

The applications of the two forms of learning can vary according to a particular context. For instance, an individual can be trained as a board member by learning how to read a budget document. Although the ability to read a budget document is vital for a board member within non-profit organizations, many such organizations cannot afford to provide necessary training even though such a skill can be transferable to different situations. As a result many organizations will rely on either informal or non-formal processes of learning as the primary approach to training paid or employees and volunteers.

Livingstone (1999) demonstrates the important role that informal learning has on individuals and the communities. For instance, Livingstone (1999) uses the metaphor of an iceberg to describe the vastness and significance of informal learning that not only goes on in organization setting

but also within individual lives. The present study focuses on the resources and types of learning that is more likely to occur within non-profit organizations and not necessarily on individual lives. In the next section, we describe key features of the two types of non-profit organizations—non-profits and co-operatives.

### **Classifications of the non-profit organizations**

Although non-profits are used as one category in the data analysis, there are at least two categories of such organizations—publicly oriented non-profits and mutual non-profits.

Publicly oriented nonprofits serve an external constituency rather than a group of members. The constituency might be the general public, as is the case with organizations such as museums, zoos, hospitals, or universities. Alternatively, it might be a specific group such as the disabled, low-income people, runaway teenagers, or abused women. The number of organizations of this kind has increased in recent years, partly because government agencies that once provided services directly are no longer doing so, and partly because individuals and families have fewer informal supports, such as extended family members or neighbours, who are able to help out when problems arise. These organizations have the common characteristics of relying on government funding in the form of either grants or billings for services, having a charitable status that allows donors to receive a tax deduction, and often having volunteers who contribute free labour. Other publicly oriented non-profits receive a substantial portion of funding from government but also receive large amounts of funding from donors such as the United Way and operate at greater distance from government. These include social service agencies such as the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies and agencies in international development such as the Red Cross.

In mutual non-profits, the members are the recipients of a service and typically have the right to participate in the affairs of the organization through electing representatives to the board of directors. Common examples of such organizations are business associations, labour unions, professional associations, consumer associations, religious congregations, ethno-cultural associations, self-help groups, social clubs, and socio-political organizations.

Mutual non-profits are similar to co-operatives; in fact, mutual aid is central to the rationale for co-operatives (Craig 1993; MacPherson 1979). Some mutual non-profits have an economic emphasis (for example, business associations and trade unions) and others are primarily social in their orientation—for example, ethno-cultural associations, religious congregations, social clubs (Quarter 1992). Not all mutual non-profits are incorporated; some (typically, unions) operate without incorporation.

Co-operative organizations serve a membership but with a different form of incorporation than mutual non-profits. The International Co-operative Alliance (the umbrella association for co-operatives internationally) defines a co-operative as: “An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” (International Co-operative Alliance, 1997). Co-operatives are guided by defining seven principles, referred to originally as the Rochdale Principles (after the founders of the first co-operative in Rochdale, England) and redefined at Manchester in 1995 (International Co-operative Alliance, 1997). These are: Voluntary and Open Membership; Democratic Member Control; Member Economic Participation; Autonomy and Independence; Education, Training and Information; Co-operation Among Co-operatives; and

Concern for Community. Although co-operatives have a different form of incorporation than non-profits, they too are set up to provide a service to a membership and hence are also referred to as mutual associations (Craig, 1993; MacPherson, 1979).

Co-operatives must maintain a balance between social and economic objectives. In areas where the social objective is greatly emphasized services such as housing, childcare and healthcare, are provided to members (Quarter 1992). In Canada, co-operatives with a social emphasis generally operate in less competitive markets and have a greater dependence on government (that may subsidize their services in part) than co-operatives with shares.

### **Research Purpose**

The organizations that participated in this study were asked to describe the learning opportunities available within their organization. In order to achieve the intended purpose of identifying learning opportunities within organizations an open-ended survey was conducted. What is the predominant form of learning? If the organization offers learning opportunities, are they dependent on any or all of the background variables (form of incorporation, charitable status, organization size)?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants and Procedure**

In order to conduct the study, a representative sample of non-profits and co-operatives in the province of Ontario was drawn. Ontario has a broad array of both non-profits and co-operatives, and therefore seemed appropriate for the purpose of the study.

For non-profits, the directory *Associations Canada 1998-99*, containing 7,354 listings for Ontario, was used to draw a sample. This appeared to be the most comprehensive sampling frame available in that it contained a range of organizations in many different fields, a range of size, and also of those with and without charitable status. For co-operatives, a list was obtained from the Co-operatives Secretariat of the Government of Canada. The Co-operatives Secretariat compiles an annual statistical profile of co-operatives in Canada and provided the list of all such organizations in Ontario. In total, there were 2,056 on the list, including 601 financial co-operatives (that is, credit unions/caisses populaires).

Given that we were unable to know in advance what portion of the organizations would agree to participate, a larger pool was employed than it was expected would be needed. For non-profits, the pool consisted of 300 organizations, or every 24<sup>th</sup> one in the directory. Using this procedure guarded against any possible bias related to alphabetical position, for example, that organizations beginning with Canadian might have different characteristics than the overall group. Similarly for co-operatives, a pool of 300 was drawn, or approximately every 7<sup>th</sup> one on the list.

With the exception of a small number of organizations that, upon being contacted, stated that they wanted to do the survey without an interview, three telephone interviewers collected the information for the study. They asked to speak either to the general manager or another key participant who was sufficiently knowledgeable to answer the questions in the survey. The participation rate was 84 per cent, somewhat higher among non-profits than among co-operatives, and particularly credit unions.

As shown on table 1 below, the final sample consisted of 212 social organizations, 66.5 per cent were corporations without share capital, or non-profits, and 33.02 per cent were co-operatives. One organization (0.47%) did not indicate their status.

**Table 1. Form of Incorporation of the sample**

	<b>Form of Incorporation</b>	
	<b>Number of Organizations</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
<b>Non-profit</b>	141	66
<b>Co-operatives</b>	70	33
<b>No answer</b>	1	1
<b>Total</b>	212	100

Forty-eight per cent of the organizations had a charitable status (see table 2). These were predominantly among the non-profits, where two-thirds had a charitable status.

**Table 2. Charitable Status of the sample**

	<b>Charitable Registration</b>	
	<b>Number of Organizations</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	102	48
<b>No</b>	110	52
<b>Total</b>	212	100

The organizations in the study had the following median descriptors: 25 years of age, 6 employees, 30 volunteers (that is a ratio of 5 volunteers to 1 employee), and just over \$500,000 of revenues. As shown on table 3, 22% of the sample has 1 to 50 members in the organization. Eleven per cent of the sample has 51 to 100 members in the organization and 10% of the sample has 101 to 150 members in the organization. Fifty per cent of the sample has more than 151 members in the organization, and 14 organizations did not indicate the number of members in their organization

**Table 3. Number of Members in Categories**

	Nber of Members	
	Number of Organizations	% of responses
<b>1 to 50</b>	47	22
<b>51 to 100</b>	24	11
<b>101 to 150</b>	21	10
<b>More than 150</b>	105	50
<b>No answer</b>	14	7
<b>Total</b>	212	100

## Measures

The present analysis is based on five items, which appeared at the end of a larger 37-item survey examining “an analytic framework to group organizations according to their underlying characteristics” (Quarter, Richmond, Sousa, and Thompson, 2000). The beginning of the survey requests background information of the organization. Items included: form of Incorporation, the organization’s charitable status; the number of employees; the number of members; the number of volunteers; and the revenue generated by the organization (see Appendix A for the survey).

Of the five additional items, the first two asked specifically about the types of learning opportunities for staff. The next two items asked about the learning opportunities for board members, volunteers, and/or members of the organization. The primary structure for the first four

items was open-ended. The final item asked what proportion of learning takes place both inside and outside of courses. After each item, participants were offered the opportunity to add supplementary information. The items that examined the types of learning opportunities available in the organizations are as follows:

1. List the informal opportunities for learning (non-course) that take place inside your organization for staff:
2. List the formal opportunities for learning (courses) that take place inside your organization for staff:
3. List the informal opportunities for learning (non-course) that take place inside your organization for Board members, volunteers, and/or members of the organization:
4. List the formal opportunities for learning (courses) that take place inside your organization for board members, volunteers, and/or members of the organization:
5. Estimate the percentage of learning that takes place in your organization outside of organized courses and inside of organized courses:
  - Outside of courses
  - Inside of courses

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was separated into two tasks. Upon completion of the data collection, the first task was to conduct a content analysis on the qualitative responses of the first four items. The responses became a list of the types of learning opportunities and resources available within the individual non-profit organizations. The results of the content analysis revealed a high degree of consistency in the responses across the organizations. The qualitative responses were then summarized into 23 different types of learning opportunities and resources, for example, whether meetings or correspondence were regarded as learning opportunities. The 23 types were then

treated as dichotomous variables and were then reapplied to the individual surveys to determine the absence or presence of those learning opportunities and resources within each organization.

A subsequent step involved creating and operationalizing the two categories of learning using the criteria provided from the “Network for New Approaches in Lifelong Learning” (NALL) web site (see Appendix B for the criteria). The two categories of learning are informal and non-formal. The results of the responses revealed that 16 variables were deemed to be informal types of learning and the 7 others were non-formal learning opportunities. A final step involved summing the incidents of each type of learning and resources and two new indices were created, non-formal and informal. Each index assessed the extent to which informal and non-formal learning occurs in the organization.

The second task was to statistically examine the categories developed from the content analysis. In order to determine the predominant form of learning and the resources that constitute the form of learning, three different analyses were undertaken. First, a reliability analysis was conducted as the primary means to determine the consistency of the developed categories. A second approach involved a frequency count of the individual categories taken from the content analysis of the interviews.

The third approach involved an examination of the relationship between the three background variables (form of incorporation, charitable status of the organization, and the organization size) and the type of learning resources available within the organizations. We conducted a cross-tabulation and a chi-square test of significance on each of the items and on the background variables in order to determine whether the type of learning and resource varies according to those background factors.



## Results

The occurrences of informal and non-formal learning varied across the organizations. As shown in table 4, non-formal learning appears to be more predominant within the sample (78.77%). However, informal learning opportunities were available within the organizations in our sample (66.51%).

**Table 4. Average types of learning occurring in the organizations**

Type of Learning	Incidence of Learning			
	Yes	% of response	No	% of response
Informal	141	66	71	34
Non-formal	167	79	45	21

As shown in table 5, 73% of the sample indicates that 0 to 20% of learning takes place outside of courses. Twenty four per cent (n=51) did not respond to this question. Seventy-three per (75% of the sample) indicates that 0 to 20% of learning takes place inside of courses. Fifty organizations (24% of the sample) did not respond to this question.

**Table 5. Percentage of learning that takes place inside and outside of courses**

Type of Learning	Location of Learning (%)					
	0 to 20	% of responses	41 - 60	% of responses	81 to 100	% of responses
Outside Course	154	73	1	1	6	3
Inside Course	160	75	1	1	1	1

### Category Reliabilities

The initial step in the data analysis was to determine the reliabilities of the post hoc categories of learning. The items referred to in this section are from the survey in Appendix A. Those variables were designed to measure what specific types of informal learning and non-formal learning opportunities are available within a type of organization. The informal learning category

had an alpha coefficient of 0.70, which indicates a very strong concordance of the items. The non-formal learning category had an alpha coefficient of 0.52, which indicates a much weaker association; however, in spite of the weak association the relationship was still positive indicating some potential exploration can be of value.

### **Available resources for learning**

In general there was a greater variety of informal learning resources than that of non-formal learning (see Appendix B for the criteria). However, non-formal learning appeared with greater frequency across the organizations. What follows is a description of each resource found within each category of learning.

### **Informal Learning**

According to the findings, some form of mentoring is available to volunteers, staff, and/or members as a learning opportunity. A few respondents indicated that mentoring emerges in the form of direct contact between one person and/or an authority figure or a person in charge. In the sample 41% of the organizations indicated that mentoring is available.

In most non-profit organizations, volunteers are provided with different learning opportunities. While members may pay for these opportunities through their membership fees, the organizations in this sample provide the same opportunities to their staff. In this sample 75% of the organizations indicated that non-course opportunities include exposure to programs offered to membership. However, the form of these non-courses is unclear. .

Most organizations develop manuals and reading materials for members and staff. The usefulness of such materials can vary from one organization to the next. Examples can include pamphlets and directories. However, 36% of the sample has staff manuals and reading materials for non-course learning. This may be due to the fact that some of the smaller organizations do not have the resources or the time to develop comprehensive manuals.

Meetings of the staff and management can be a regular occurrence within non-profit organizations. These settings provide an opportunity to exchange information and to solve problems that arise within the programs or services offered by an organization. In this sample, 84% indicated that staff meetings provide educational opportunities.

A terrific opportunity for people to learn is from meeting colleagues. In these instances, a form of networking between people is possible since people will maintain contact with those that can provide assistance. Furthermore, networking allows access to knowledge that may be available through a more formal setting. In this sample of organizations, relying on networking between people is very common. Specifically, 73% of the sample indicated that networking has a role in learning.

Most organizations allow for off-site sessions of brainstorming or developing future plans. In these instances individuals often take a retreat. However, for organizations that may be smaller, such an expense is not possible. In this sample of organizations 12% indicated that retreats have a role in learning. One reason may be that connecting with people outside of the organization may be more of a priority.

In organizations with a mandate to provide a service to the public or to a membership disseminating information can be done on a regular basis through inexpensive means. One approach has been to develop a newsletter outlining current practices of the organizations; another is to monitor newsletters from other organizations. In both instances, having a newsletter is important. In this sample, 76% indicated that newsletters have a role in learning.

Regular operational updates for staff, volunteers, and/or members are another source of information that people may utilize for learning. With the introduction of new technologies, individuals may benefit immediately by such exchanges of information via electronic mail; however, one must be familiar with the technology in order to benefit from email. Furthermore, bulletins and mail does offer immediate information so it may not have an essential role in learning. In the present sample of organizations 53% indicated that mail, bulletins, or e-mail has a role in learning.

Since the Internet is a relatively new resource, its potential may not be felt in this sample of organizations. Additionally, accessing the Internet requires that an organization have the infrastructure available. Financial constraints may preclude this from happening. In this sample 38% indicated that the Internet has a role in learning.

Journals often contain up-to-date information. However, journals may be inaccessible to some people because of cost and of education levels. In this sample of organizations, 7% indicated that journals have a role in learning.

In general, manuals are provided to the staff and the membership. These manuals refer to policies and procedures that may not be directly relevant to everyone in an organization. While the manuals provide direction in which one operates within an organization, its learning potential may be limited once the material has been absorbed. In this sample of organizations, 46% provides board members and volunteers with a manual regarding policies and procedures.

Watching videos is often a quick way to learn new skills or acquire new information. Videos often provide information for viewers in different areas, and learning can occur. That said, videos can be expensive and may be beyond the means of many non-profit organizations. In this sample of organizations 5% indicated that videos have a role in learning.

As described above, the main way that individuals learn is through direct contact with others. Again, the role of meetings in learning is very significant. In this sample of organizations, 79% indicated that meetings have a role in learning.

An important aspect informal learning is its availability to those that may not have these opportunities. An example of this may be volunteers who serve as board members of non-profits. The majority of the organizations in this sample, 56% indicated that the board members' duties are done by volunteers.

In different organizations, personal correspondence is often frowned upon. One reason is that it can take time away from one's work. In this sample of organizations, 32% indicated that personal correspondence (mail, e-mails, letters, faxes) has a role in learning.

Being on the telephone is supposed to serve a purpose, such as answering queries or seeking information. In this sample of organizations 24% indicated that telephone calls have a role in learning. Ninety-eight percent also indicated that radio, news, or advertisements have a role in learning.

### **Non-formal Learning**

Many often need time away from the organization, time that can be used to upgrade knowledge. However, only 14% of the sample provides study or sabbatical leave. In this sample of organizations, 49% indicated that conferences have a role in learning.

Orientations often serve the purpose of introducing individuals to an organization; specifically, learning about the organization. In this sample, 50% provide an orientation.

Conferences can be used to exhibit their work, and perhaps even raise some funds for their organization. In this sample of organizations, 56% indicates that events or conferences organized by the group are used as an opportunity to learn and/or fundraise.

Certification can be regarded as a way for organizations to encourage staff and members to upgrade their skills. However, the organizations in this sample do not appear to have such structures in place; only 3% provides certification. Table 6 below contains all of the resources that the sample indicated was present as learning opportunities within their organization. The list is ranked according to the frequency of occurrence.

**Table 6. Learning resources available in the organizations**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
<b>Informal Learning</b>		
Staff meetings	178	84
General meetings	167	79
Newsletters	161	76
Exposure to programs offered to membership	159	75
Networking	154	73
Mail, bulletins, or e-mail	111	52
Board and volunteers policies and procedures manual	98	46
Mentoring	86	41
Internet	81	38
Staff manuals and reading materials	77	34
Personal correspondence (mail, e-mails, letters, faxes)	68	32
Telephone calls	50	24
Retreats	26	12
Periodicals	15	7
Videos	10	5
Radio, news, or advertisements	4	2
<b>Non-formal Learning</b>		
Provide money for upgrading skills	141	67
fundraise	118	56
Opportunities for workshops, training and courses	115	54
Orientation	105	50
Attending conferences	103	49
Study or sabbatical leave	30	14
Certification	5	2

As shown on table 6, upgrading skills is often done through workshops or in-house courses. In this sample of organizations, 54% indicated that workshops, training, and courses have a role in learning. Similarly, training is usually done at the beginning of employment. However, over time individuals need to make sure that they are up to date. In this sample of organizations, 67% indicated that there is access to money for upgrading skills.

## **Relationship between background factors and categories**

The items that demonstrate the presence of resources encouraging informal or non-formal learning was cross-tabulated with the three background variables—form of incorporation; charitable status; and organization size. A subsequent chi-square test of statistical significance was used to determine the relationship between the presence of learning and the background variables. The critical levels for statistical significance ranged from 0.10 to 0.001.

### **Form of Incorporation**

The chi-square test of the individual items revealed that 7 statistically significant variables within the informal learning category and 5 within the non-formal learning category are related to an organization's form of incorporation (either co- non-profit or operative). Table 7 provides the statistical account of the individual items that were significant within each category of learning.

The following points describe the statistically significant items.

- Both forms of incorporation were likely to provide some form of informal and non-formal learning opportunities;
- Neither form of incorporation was more likely than the other to provide staff manuals and reading materials provided for non-course learning as a learning opportunity;
- Neither form of incorporation was more likely than the other to have retreats;
- Both forms of incorporation were consider newsletters as a form of learning;
- Non-profits were more likely than co-operatives to consider mail, bulletins, or e-mail to have a role in learning;
- Neither form of incorporation was more likely than the other consider the using of the internet as a learning opportunity;
- Both forms of organizations consider meetings to have a role in learning
- Neither form of incorporation was more likely than the other consider personal correspondence (mail, e-mails, letters, faxes) as having a role in learning

- In general, a study or sabbatical leave is not provided, but non-profits were likely than co-operatives to provide one.
- Non-profits are more likely than co-ops to find that conferences have a role in learning.
- Co-operatives are more likely than non-profits to offer orientations.
- Non-profits are more likely than co-ops to find that events or conferences organized by the group are an opportunity to learn and/ or fundraise; and
- Non-profits are more likely than co-ops to find that workshops, training, and courses have a role in learning.

**Table 7. Resources available within each form of organization**

Type of Learning	Form of incorporation				$\chi^2$	df
	Non-profit		Co-operative			
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
<b>Informal Learning</b>	100	41	41	29	3.22 <sup>†</sup>	1
Staff manuals and reading materials	45	96	31	39	3.11 <sup>*</sup>	1
Retreats	25	116	1	69	11.51 <sup>***</sup>	1
Newsletters	113	28	48	22	3.46 <sup>†</sup>	1
Mail, bulletins, or e-mail	88	53	22	48	17.99 <sup>***</sup>	1
Internet	68	73	13	57	17.39 <sup>***</sup>	1
General meetings	117	24	49	21	4.70 <sup>*</sup>	1
Personal correspondence (mail, e-mails, letters, faxes)	54	87	14	56	7.17 <sup>**</sup>	1
<b>Non-formal Learning</b>	117	24	49	21	4.70 <sup>*</sup>	1
Study or sabbatical leave	24	117	5	65	3.85 <sup>*</sup>	1
Attending conferences	88	53	14	56	33.69 <sup>***</sup>	1
Orientation	63	78	41	29	3.61 <sup>†</sup>	1
Events or conferences to learn how to fundraise	91	50	26	44	14.21 <sup>***</sup>	1
Opportunities for workshops, training and courses	90	51	25	45	14.91 <sup>***</sup>	1

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p< 0.001; † p< 0.10

### Charitable Status

The chi-square test of the individual items revealed that 6 statistically significant variables within the informal learning category and 4 within the non-formal learning category are related

to those organizations that have charitable status. Table 8 provides the statistical account of the individual items that were significant within each category of learning. The following points describe the statistically significant items of those organization's that have charitable status.

- In general, organizations with charitable status are more likely to provide opportunities for non-formal learning than informal learning;
- Those organizations with charitable status do not find that retreats have a role in learning;
- Organizations with charitable status find that newsletters have a role in learning;
- Organizations with charitable status find that mail, bulletins, or e-mail has a role in learning;
- Organizations with charitable status are not likely to find that radio, news, or advertisements have a role in learning;
- Organizations with charitable status are more likely to find that conferences have a role in learning than organizations without charitable status;
- Organizations with charitable status are more likely to find that events or conferences organized by the group are opportunities to learn and/ or fundraise;
- Organizations with charitable status are more likely to find that workshops, training, and courses have a role in learning; and
- Organizations with charitable status are more likely to provide access to or have money for upgrading skills.

**Table 8. Resources available within each organization that have charitable status**

Type of Learning	Presence of Learning Opportunity							$\chi^2$	df
	Charitable Organization			Non-Charitable Organization					
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total			
<b>Informal Learning</b>	73	68	141	29	42	71	ns		
Retreats	21	81	102	5	105	110	12.66***	1	
Newsletters	83	19	102	78	32	110	3.17 <sup>†</sup>	1	
Mail, bulletins, or e-mail	60	42	102	51	59	110	3.30 <sup>†</sup>	1	
Internet	47	50	97	34	76	110	5.16*	1	
General meetings	88	14	102	79	31	110	6.61*	1	
Radio, news, or advertisements	4	98	102	0	110	110	4.40*	1	
<b>Non-formal Learning</b>	88	14	102	79	31	110	6.61***	1	
Attending conferences	65	37	102	38	72	110	18.04***	1	
Organize events or conferences to learn how to fundraise	67	35	102	51	59	110	8.01**	1	
Opportunities for workshops, training and courses	67	35	102	48	62	110	10.37***	1	
Provide money for upgrading skills	75	27	102	66	44	110	4.35*	1	

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p< 0.001; ns = non significance

## Organization Size

The chi-square test of the individual items revealed that 5 statistically significant variables within the informal learning category and 1 within the non-formal learning category are related to the size of the organization's size. Table 9 provides the statistical account of the individual items that were significant within each category of learning. The following points describe the statistically significant items.

- In general, organizations of all sizes are more likely to provide opportunities for formal learning than non-formal learning;
- Exposure to non-course opportunities was positively related to organization size;

- The view that staff meetings provide educational opportunities was positively related to organization size;
- The view that networking has a role in learning was positively related to organization size;
- The view that newsletters have a role in learning was positively related to organization size;
- The view that mail, bulletins, or e-mail have a role in learning was more likely to be found in the larger organizations; and
- The view that study or sabbatical has a role in learning was not found to be related to organization size;

**Table 9. Resources available within each organization of different sizes**

Type of Learning	Number of Members								$\chi^2$	df
	1 to 50		51 to 100		101 to 150		More than 151			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
<b>Informal</b>	24	23	16	8	18	3	76	30	9.85*	3
Exposure to programs offered to membership	29	18	22	2	18	3	82	24	9.76*	3
Staff meetings	36	11	21	3	21	0	91	15	6.50 <sup>†</sup>	3
Networking	30	17	16	8	20	1	79	27	7.93*	3
Newsletters	26	21	18	6	19	2	89	17	17.45***	3
Mail, bulletins, or e-mail	18	29	8	16	13	8	65	41	11.39**	3
<b>Non-formal</b>	31	16	20	4	18	3	86	20	ns	
Study or sabbatical leave	3	44	1	23	6	15	19	87	8.84*	3

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p< 0.001; † p< 0.10; ns = non significance

## **Discussion**

As indicated in the introduction, the aim of this study was to explore the incidences of both informal and non-formal learning in non-profit organizations and co-operatives. As shown in the results, non-formal learning is the predominant form of learning occurring within the non-profit and co-operative organizations, and in non-profits more than co-operatives. Having a charitable status and organization size were also positively related to the value placed on informal learning.

Although we were able to achieve the desired goal of determining the predominant type of learning in this sample of non-profit organizations, a number of limitations emerged during the process of completing the study. These limitations should be taken into account for future research. First, as indicated, this study was part of a larger research project examining different aspects of the non-profit organization. The notion of learning was not part of the larger survey and as such may not have been an area about which the interviewee was very knowledgeable. For instance, the interviewees were asked operational questions such as “how does one become a board member?” The knowledge required to know the operations of the organization is vastly different than that needed to explain the different forms of learning occurring within the organization.

A second limitation is related to the applicability of the questions. The stated goal of this study was to gather descriptive information about learning in non-profit organizations. Little consideration was given to what type of data was being sought. For instance, one of the questions asked about the formal learning that occurs within their organizations but subsequent review of the responses demonstrated that the descriptors were in fact exemplifying informal and non-formal learning. As a result, the post hoc descriptions of the resources available are debatable given the arbitrariness with

which the types were developed. A future study should ensure that definitions of the different notions of learning are appropriate to the wording of the questions. Future studies should make greater efforts to achieve an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability within the forms of learning.

Despite the different limitations associated with the design of this study, the goal of determining what form of learning is predominant in non-profit organizations was achieved. As shown in the results the organizations favour a non-formal learning approach, which was demonstrated in the types of resources that are already in place for both volunteer and paid employees. The question remains why these organizations favour a non-formal approach to learning more than an informal approach. Future studies should use the resources discovered in this study as indicators to determine not only the type of learning that an organization utilizes but also the significance of the resources that are offered by the organizations. Specifically, measuring the impact of the resources for learning should be a goal for future research.

The obstacles and barriers to establishing a learning environment were not explored in this study. It is unclear whether the type of learning that is predominant within an organization arose because of challenges faced by organizations. According to anecdotal evidence many non-profit organizations will pursue informal or non-formal methods of learning because of costs associated with providing formal mechanisms for learning. There may also be philosophical objections to providing formal education opportunities because of challenges to adult learning and teaching.

Finally, in most instances the organizations included in this study are part of a larger community of service providers that operate within a partnership arrangement with government agencies and they tend to prioritize the social aspects of service delivery over the economic benefits. It is unknown

whether the type of learning that appears predominant in a non-profit organization is related to their mandate or to a partnership with the government. Furthermore, as described previously it is unknown whether the learning process evolved organically over the life span of the organization or was deliberately created in order to compensate for decreasing operating funds.

In sum, future research should not only explore the internal dynamics of individual organizations but also the dynamics of belonging to a wider community of service providers. The dominance of non-formal learning over informal learning has been demonstrated in this study; however, because there are a greater number of informal learning opportunities available within the organizations it is premature to state unequivocally that informal learning does not have an important place.

Furthering this area of research by using the suggestions above will demonstrate the importance of alternate forms of learning for non-profit organizations and also how the forms of learning can be a catalyst for social change.

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**Appendix A**  
**Confidential Non-Profit/Co-operative Survey**

**Background Information:**

1. Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Your position in the organization: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Organization name: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Address: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

6. How old is your organization? \_\_\_\_\_ Years

7. Which of the following best describes your organization:

1. Corporation without share capital (non-profit)
2. Co-operative without share capital (non-profit)
3. Co-operative with share capital
4. Unincorporated association
5. A trust
6. Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. Circle the jurisdiction(s) in which your organization is registered: (circle one number)

- |                     |                |                         |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. British Columbia |                |                         |
| 4. Manitoba         |                |                         |
| 7. New Brunswick    | 2. Alberta     |                         |
| 10. Newfoundland    | 5. Ontario     |                         |
|                     | 8. Nova Scotia | 3. Saskatchewan         |
|                     | 11. Federal    | 6. Quebec               |
|                     |                | 9. Prince Edward Island |

9. Does your organization have a charitable registration number?

1. Yes
2. No

10. YES, for how many years?

11. Total number of employees in the organization:

**Social Objectives:**

12. Why was your organization formed originally?

13. What is its current mission?

14. How would you rate your organization's social objectives relative to its commercial objectives?

My organization's social objectives are: (circle one number)

1. Much less important
2. Less important
3. Of equal importance
4. More important
5. Much more important

14a. Please elaborate:

15. To what extent does your organization view itself as part of one or more social movements? (Circle one number)

1. Not at all
2. A little
3. Somewhat
4. Moderately
5. A lot

15a. Please elaborate or indicate which social movement or movements:

16 To what extent does your organization view itself as an agency of social change? (Circle one number)

1. Not at all
2. A little
3. Somewhat
4. Moderately
5. A lot

16a. Please elaborate:

17. Relative to service to its consumers, how important are your organization's social movement goals? (Circle one number)

1. Much less important
2. Less important
3. Of equal importance
4. More important
5. Much more important

17a. Please elaborate:

**Relationship to Government and Private Sector:**

18. In the last fiscal year, approximately what were your organization's gross revenues?

a. Please identify the top 3 sources of your organization's revenues.

b. Approximately what percentage of those revenues came from the following sources:

- a) Investments
- b) Sales of services
- c) Sales of products
- d) Membership fees
- e) Contracts with non-government sources
- f) Government contracts
- g) Government grants
- h) Donations from individuals
- i) Donations from businesses
- j) Donations from foundations
- k) Other sources (specify)

19. Apart from the financial relationship, which of the following best describes your organization's relationship to government? (Circle one number)

1. Highly independent
2. Mostly independent
3. Equally independent & dependent
4. Mostly dependent
5. Highly dependent

19a. Please elaborate:

20. To what extent does your organization have to compete in the market with private sector companies to earn its revenues? (Circle one number)
1. Not at all
  2. A little
  3. Somewhat
  4. Moderately
  5. A lot

20a. Please elaborate:

21. To what extent does your organization utilize partnerships with private sector companies? (Circle one number)
1. Not at all
  2. A little
  3. Somewhat
  4. Moderately
  5. A lot

21a. Please elaborate:

22. Even though your organization's incorporation differs from private sector businesses, to what extent do you view your organization as similar to them? (Circle one number)
1. Not at all
  2. A little
  3. Somewhat
  4. Moderately
  5. A lot

22a. Please elaborate:

### **Governance:**

23. Are there general meetings of the membership (as distinct from the board meetings)?
1. Yes
  2. No

23a. If YES, how many members (people who are eligible to vote at meetings) would usually attend?

24. How many members does your organization have?

25. Who is eligible for membership?

26. Describe the process for becoming a member.

27. How many board members does your organization have?
28. Describe the process for becoming a board member. (Circle one number)
1. Election by the general membership
  2. Appointment by the board
  3. Appointment by government
  4. Other (specify):
29. How long is a board member's normal term of service? (Circle one number)
1. 1 year
  2. 2 years
  3. More than 3 years
  4. Other (specify):
30. How often does the board meet? (Circle one number)
1. Annually
  2. Quarterly
  3. Bi-monthly
  4. Monthly
  5. Bi-weekly
  6. Weekly
  7. Other (specify):
31. To what extent does the general membership influence the decisions of the board of directors/trustees? (Circle one number)
1. Not at all
  2. A little
  3. Somewhat
  4. Moderately
  5. A lot
- 31a. Please elaborate:
32. To what extent does the board of directors/trustees influence the decisions of senior management? (Circle one number)
1. Not at all
  2. A little
  3. Somewhat
  4. Moderately
  5. A lot
- 32a. Please elaborate:

33. To what extent does the general membership influence the decisions of senior management? (Circle one number)
1. Not at all
  2. A little
  3. Somewhat
  4. Moderately
  5. A lot

33a. Please elaborate:

**Volunteers:**

34. How many volunteers does your organization have?

35. Describe the types of activities undertaken by volunteers:

1. Board of directors
2. Board committees
3. Other committees
4. Fundraising
5. Other service (specify):

36. To what extent is your organization referred to as a volunteer organization? (Circle one number)

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Always

36a. Please elaborate:

37. To what extent do volunteers (other than board members) influence the decisions of management? (Circle one number)

1. Not at all
2. A little
3. Somewhat
4. Moderately
5. A lot

37a. Please elaborate

## **Learning and Organization:**

The following questions refer to the learning processes within your organization. Much learning in organizations takes place by informal means (that is, outside of courses). Some learning is provided through organized courses.

38. List the informal opportunities for learning (non-course) that take place inside your organization for staff:
39. List the formal opportunities for learning (courses) that take place inside your organization for staff:
40. List the informal opportunities for learning (non-course) that take place inside your organization for Board members, volunteers, and/or members of the organization:
41. List the formal opportunities for learning (courses) that take place inside your organization for Board members, volunteers, and/or members of the organization:
42. Estimate the percentage of learning that takes place in your organization outside of organized courses and inside of organized courses:
  - a. Outside of courses:
  - b. Inside of courses:
43. Other comments about any part of this survey:

## **Appendix B**

### **Learning Types**

#### **Informal Learning**

- Learning computer skills related to employment, communications skills through community volunteer work, home renovations and cooking skills in household work, and general interest learning about health issues
- Informal learning includes anything we do outside of organized courses to gain significant knowledge, skill or understanding. It occurs either on our own or with other people.
- 4 aspects of informal learning: employment related; community volunteer work related; household work related; and other general interest related
- knowledge in job/career
- Employment-related computer learning
- Learning new job tasks
- Learning problem solving/communication skills
- Occupational health and safety
- Community related informal learning
- Interpersonal skills
- Communication skills
- Social and environmental issues
- Organizational/managerial skills
- Home renovations, gardening, cooking, and maintenance
- Health and well being
- Finances
- Different skills, including: hobby, social, sports and recreation.
- Self-directed learning activities
- Any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of institutions providing educational programs, courses or workshops
- May occur in any context outside institutional curricula
- It is distinguished from everyday perceptions and general socialization by peoples' own conscious identification of the activity as significant learning
- The basic terms of informal learning (objectives, content, means and processes of acquisition, duration, evaluation of outcomes, applications) are determined by the individuals and groups who choose to engage in it, without the presence of an institutionally-authorized instructor
- Learning that we undertake on our own, either individually or collectively, without externally imposed criteria
- The important features here are that we make some deliberate and sustained effort to gain a new form of understanding, knowledge or skill, and that this effort takes a recognizable amount of time
- Gained a new significant form of knowledge, understanding or skill on your own initiative that you retain long enough to recognize it retrospectively
- You can do it any time, any where, with anyone

- You may pick up a great deal of information from the people you are engaged with any particular political activity
- It is continually ongoing and it can be related to other forms of organized education at various times
- Diverse processes through which you can acquire the knowledges that are ultimately personally significant and socially valued outcomes
- The collective aspects of our informal learning, the social engagement with others that is an integral part of any actual knowledge acquisition process
- Many informal learning projects are conducted through group activities
- The non-linear time duration of much informal learning
- It is conceivable that you can learn life-course shaping or influencing information within a very short of time in an "organizing circumstance"
- Self-recognition: what has been important to you, what have you accomplished through informal learning projects that you can recognize
- A process that's determined either by an individual or an informally constituted group of people in their own terms
- It's indigenous, internal to that individual or group itself
- They determine what they're going to do, how long they're going to do it, and what the ultimate objectives are going to be

### **Non-Formal Learning (further education)**

- Non-formal education refers to classroom-based courses
- Further education refers to continuing adult participation in the course offerings of various educational institutions, including workshops and conferences, short or long courses, or longer programs

<sup>i</sup> Editor's note: This preliminary study was conducted with respondents identified as authorized to report on organizational provision of non-formal education courses and informal education activities. It was not intended to address other forms of self-directed informal learning pursued by organization members.