

The lived
experiences
of Nundah
Community
Enterprise
Cooperative
Members



2016 Research Report

Presented to the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative

By

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Executive Summary

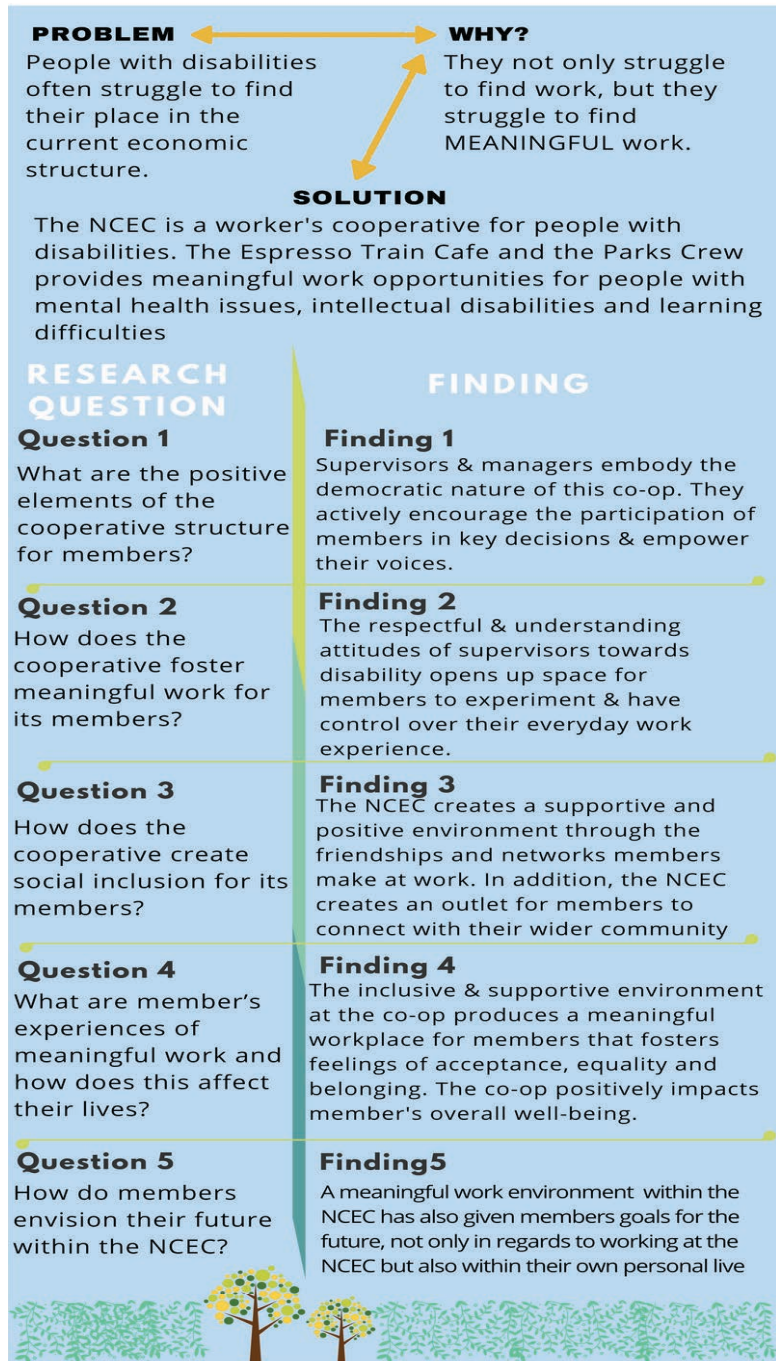
This report explores the experiences of members at the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative (NCEC), a worker's cooperative that was created to provide sustainable employment and training opportunities for those with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness. This cooperative employs people at their Espresso Train Café in Nundah, and also in a parks maintenance service that have mowing and garden maintenance contracts around Brisbane. This study will focus on the factors that facilitate meaningful work opportunities for people with a disability or mental illness at the NCEC. Our research makes explicit the key elements that impact members' mental health and wellbeing at work, such as the importance of democratic values, the role of supervisors, and how connected members feel to their colleagues and community. This research has the ability to inform future cooperative movements, and will make the NCEC more successful in articulating practices that work well. Eight conversational interviews were conducted with members of the cooperative in order to uncover the lived experiences of members. A narrative research approach was utilised followed by a thematic analysis.

The major findings of the research project are

- The cooperative structure encourages members to have a say, value workers for who they are, and supports their autonomy. Cooperatives, as organisations unite in meeting the shared economic, social and personal needs and aspirations of their members, create an environment where the individual needs of people with disabilities can be prioritised, further facilitating the empowerment of 'individuals' to fulfil their potential through work. Supervisors and managers operationalise the democratic nature of the cooperative, through actively encouraging the participation of members in key decisions, empowering members' voices.

- Many participants acknowledged they had an increased sense of belonging, happiness and confidence in comparison to past experiences of work. This was shown through the majority of members' willingness to connect with the broader community, and the involvement of the NCEC in their future aspirations. The flexible, respectful, and caring work environment at the cafe and within the parks crew was found to improve members' mental and emotional wellbeing as they feel accepted for who they are.

NUNDAH COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE COOPERATIVE



To see a visual representation of our project summary see Appendix 1.

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Abstract

Literature suggests that meaningful work is a fundamental human need, and people living with disabilities often struggle to access meaningful employment (Yeoman 2014). For the last 18 years, the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative (NCEC) through the Espresso Train Café and the Parks Crew have provided meaningful employment opportunities for people with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness. This report explores the lived experiences of members at the NCEC with the aim of identifying key elements that impact members' mental health and wellbeing at work. We utilised a narrative approach in eight conversational interviews conducted with members of the NCEC in order to document their unique and diverse experiences. Following this, a thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the data for the report. Our results conclude that meaningful work and social inclusion are outcomes of a work environment that encourages and empowers members to have their say in key decisions and to co-create networks with their co-workers and the wider community. This research is significant as it has the ability to inform future cooperative movements and governments of the key aspects which make work environments meaningful for those with intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties and mental illnesses. Similarly, documenting the elements that are of interest and/or concern to the membership of the NCEC will help to make the cooperative more successful and to ensure its sustainability.

Introduction

Many people living with disabilities, mental illness, and learning difficulties struggle to “find their place in the current economic structure” (NCEC n.d). They not only fight to access employment, but to obtain “meaningful employment” (NCEC n.d.). Meaningful employment can be defined as feelings of belonging, acceptance and self-worth that are associated with work (Leufstadius et al 2009: 21). In Australia, current models of support for people with disabilities seeking employment are proving inadequate (Purcal & Fisher 2014; Soldatic & Pini 2012). The result has been an endless cycle of job placements that impact negatively upon people’s wellbeing and sense of self-worth (Richards 2016). Over the last 18 years the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative (NCEC) has been exploring possible solutions to this challenge through the creation of a worker’s cooperative for people with learning difficulties, intellectual disabilities and mental illness. Cooperatives are defined by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) as “autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” (Majee & Hoyt 2011).

The nature of this initiative – and part of its sustainability - lies in its localised, small scale and individualised approach. However, this means the reach of this model has been limited. As it approaches two decades of work, the NCEC is motivated to influence discussion around social and labour policy relevant to the long-term unemployed, particularly amongst those identified in policy and practice as “people with intellectual

disabilities and mental health issues” (Richard Warner, personal communication, 18 April 2016).

The aim of this project has been to make explicit the key elements that are of interest and/or concern to the membership of the NCEC and its relevant partners (e.g. the Community Living Association and to document elements of the NCEC that could be relevant for other community owned enterprises and cooperatives. Based upon this, our research uncovers the lived experiences of cooperative members in order to better understand the positive elements of the cooperative that resonate with members. Our research uncovers how and why the NCEC has been so successful in fostering meaningful work opportunities for people with disabilities, as well as providing the NCEC with the opportunity to further strengthen its own practices.

The concepts that underpin our research include meaningful work, social inclusion and the cooperative model. We have used these concepts to theoretically ground our research questions. We wish to explore how these concepts interlink with members’ experiences at the NCEC (Ackerman et al 2016).

Background

The Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative is a worker’s cooperative that was created to provide sustainable employment and training opportunities for those with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness. This cooperative employs people at their Espresso Train Café in Nundah, and also in a parks maintenance service

that have mowing and garden maintenance contracts around Brisbane. Beginning in 1998 as jobs club, the NCEC now has 26 members that have an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness and several others that don't. Of those with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness, 80% of them have remained with the NCEC since it's formation. The cooperative now generates over 5000 hours of work every year (CLA 2015).

The cooperative has a manager and two supervisors that work in the Café and Parks crew. The cooperative works alongside the Community Living Association that provides on going social work support to members.

Literature review

The research conducted at the NCEC addresses the concept of meaningful work, however, additional key concepts relate to this idea within our research, including social inclusion and the cooperative model. By reviewing these concepts in the literature we aim to establish the significance of meaningful work, social inclusion, and cooperatives and identify the lack of research which links these concepts to people with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness.

Literature on meaningful work focuses on either the theoretical and conceptual discussions surrounding why work is meaningful, or encompasses studies undertaken regarding what meaningful work looks like in various contexts. Research looking into meaningful work discusses the idea that it can contribute to "human flourishing"

(Veltman 2015: 425). Yeoman argues that meaningful work is a fundamental human need, based upon our “inescapable interests in freedom, autonomy and dignity” (Yeoman 2014: 235). Feelings of “acceptance, belonging and fulfilment of norms and values” are associated outcomes of positive and meaningful work environments (Leufstadius et al 2009: 21).

Literature regarding meaningful work for people with disabilities is less extensive, however a number of insightful studies and papers are available and are discussed below. These studies indicate that work significantly contributes to the wellbeing and happiness of people with disabilities (Saunders and Nedelec; Fesko et al. 2012; Freedman and Fesko 1996; Leufstadius et al 2009; Dunn, Wewiorski & Rogers 2008).

Freedman and Fesko conducted a qualitative study consisting of focus groups in order to establish the perspectives of people with significant disabilities and their family members regarding their employment experiences. The research concludes that, for people with significant disabilities, engaging in meaningful work that provides them with a purpose and structure is essential (Freeman & Fesko 1996). The results also highlight that “self-esteem and well-being of individuals” is “critical to job outcome”, and that having a place in society, developing positive relationships and feelings of “belonging and acceptance” is important (Freedman & Fesko 1996: 51). Similarly, Leufstadius et al’s study looks at how people with persistent mental illness experience and describe meaningfulness of work. This study compliments the work of Freedman and Fesko, concluding that people with mental illness feel that: “participation in different contexts

gives a feeling of normality, acceptance, belonging and fulfilment of norms and values”, and that “work increases well-being and strengthens one’s identity” (Leufstadius et al 2009).

There are considerable gaps in the literature on meaningful work. There is a belief that “available measurements of meaningful work are imprecise” (Lips-Wiersma and Wright 2012: 656). The current literature available on meaningful work is not able to contribute to understandings of how different organisations and workplaces can achieve a meaningful environment for their employees, especially those with disabilities (Wrzesniewski 2003; Pratt and Ashford 2003; Lips-Wiersma and Wright 2012). Our research at the NCEC is therefore innovative as one of our aims is to fill a gap in current literature by articulating the elements that create meaning in a workplace for people with disabilities. Furthermore, this study looks specifically at the relationship between the cooperative model and meaningful work, adopting a unique approach and contributing new material to current literature.

The second concept relating to meaningful work is social inclusion. Simplican et. al., (2015) defines social inclusion as the interaction between two major domains of life including interpersonal relationships and community involvement. Employment is often used within society as an avenue for social inclusion because it is seen to play a substantial role in how individuals fulfil their citizenship duties (Rummery, 2006; Stancliffe, 2014; Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Morris 2001). Morris’ (2001) review focuses on the exclusion which people with disabilities face in relation to employment and highlights how there can be a lack of policy consideration directed towards the ways in which

employers deliver support. The need to change the concept behind supported employment to allow for wider opportunities for the unemployable has also been raised (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Morris, 2001). Our research will contribute to understanding models of support and identify the resources needed for facilitating a supportive work environment for people with intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties and mental illness.

Stancliffe (2014) focuses on adults with a disability and the outcomes of their inclusion in Australian society. Stancliffe (2014) found that sheltered employment for people with disabilities provides little employment-related inclusion, and compared how employment in ordinary jobs plays a significant social role and is an important form of inclusion. Our research complements Stancliffe's perspective as it addresses cooperatives as providers of open and inclusive work for those with an intellectual disability. Discovering how meaningful employment can provide an avenue for social inclusion is integral to our research, as encouraging worker participation is one of the many elements of cooperatives

Previous research has identified the role of cooperatives in applying community development strategies focussed on community control, local ownership, social enterprise development and community leadership development (Majee & Hoyt 2011; Roulstone & Hwang 2015; Nolan, Massebiaux & Gorman, 2013; Vicari 2014).

Community development strategies can provide a mechanism to lift marginalised groups out of disadvantage by expanding and sustaining social capital (Majee & Hoyt 2011; Roulstone & Hwang 2015). Cooperative institutions have historically proven

useful when improving the lives of disadvantaged or oppressed populations (Majee & Hoyt 2011). Contemporary debates have included the use of cooperatives in addressing limitations regarding government disability support, and the ability of cooperatives to dissolve paternalist support structures while re-balancing social and economic support for people with disabilities in a more holistic way (Roulstone & Hwang 2015).

Much of the literature has focussed on the 'conceptual components' of cooperatives and their potential benefits for members, with findings confirming that members' involvement in decision-making (a core cooperative principle) has a positive effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Holland et al 2011; Farndale et al, 2011; Nolan, Massebiaux & Gorman, 2013). However, some social enterprises have been critiqued for their lack of participatory management and their orientation towards market based principals. This can inhibit the degree of participation in the decision-making process, which is an integral part of social endeavours (Ohana, Meyer & Swanton 2012).

Our research fills gaps in the research relating to how cooperatives impact people's lives outside the organization, as well as within. Our research will enhance understanding of the far-reaching impacts which cooperatives can have on their members' lives. Our investigation into the lived experiences of members with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness at the NCEC will therefore enrich existing literature on how the core values and principles which cooperatives are built on can translate into improving lives.

The above insights from the literature reveal a powerful affinity between cooperative enterprises, social inclusion and meaningful work. The need for further exploration into

the use of cooperatives in addressing gaps in disability employment services, and the effect on the lives of their members has guided our research and the development of our research questions (Ackerman et al. 2016).

Research questions

Our research questions are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of cooperative members with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty and mental illness within the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative?
 - a. What are the positive elements of the cooperative structure for members?
 - b. How does the cooperative help foster meaningful work for its members?
 - c. How does the cooperative create social inclusion for its members?
 - d. What are members' experiences of meaningful work and how does this affect their lives?
 - e. How do members envision their future within the NCEC?

Methodology

Research design and methods

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate way of gathering data relevant to the research problem based on the centrality of members' lived experience to the aims of this project. Qualitative data provides rich, contextually located data that can uncover unknown factors in the research problem (Cresswell 2013:24), while also valuing the contribution of participants as the most reliable source of knowledge on problems affecting them (Van den Hoonaard 2012:2). Narrative research was therefore chosen as the best way to approach the collection of personal experiences needed to answer our research questions. Denborough notes the transformative and empowering effects that narrative processes can have on individuals who share their story in a trusting environment (2006:47; Ackerman et al 2016). Narrative research served to draw together elements of people's stories to convey a meaningful continuum of participant's past and present circumstances (Polkinghorne 1995:12)

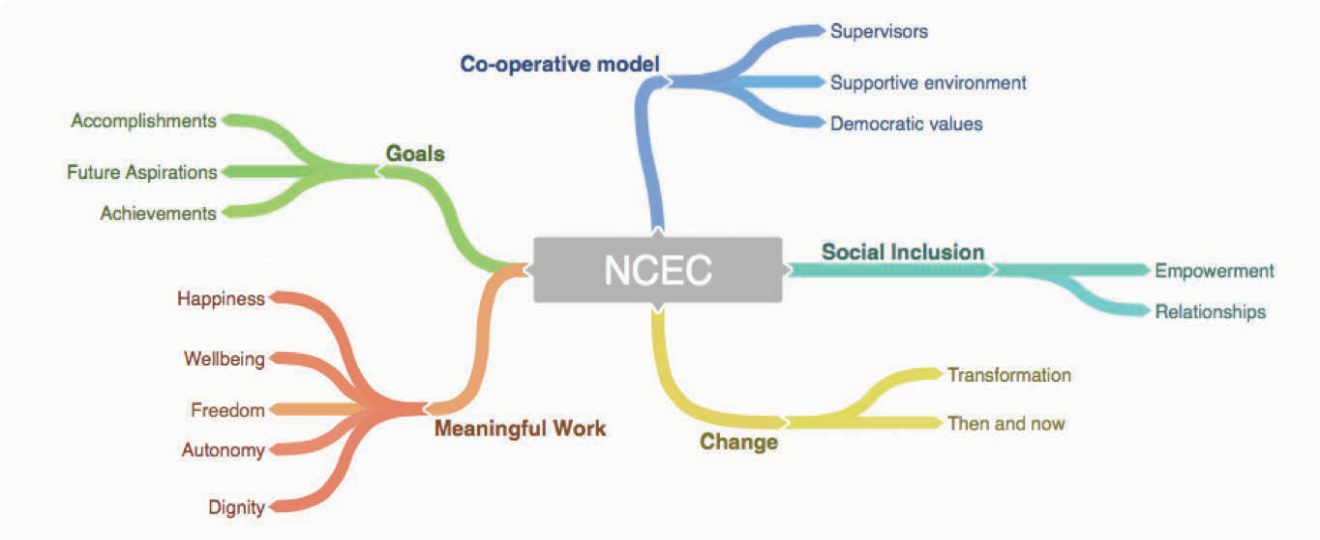
Interviews provided the basis for our research and helped to facilitate our secondary visual methods. Interviews were integral to understanding the meanings that participants gave to their experiences and were essential to gathering data on how members felt about their involvement in the NCEC (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006: 314). An ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional) structure for focused conversations was used to organise interviews to facilitate versatility, and honesty whilst stopping conversational drift (Stanfield 2000: 21 & 23; Ackerman et al 2016) (Appendix 2 & 3).

We adopted a visual element alongside our interview process as “visual image has been seen to empower those from disadvantaged groups through creating enhanced choice and control through the research process” (Kearns 2014: 506). We adopted two visual tools – a relationship map and people tree, utilised to facilitate a dynamic understanding of lived experiences with cooperative members. Specifically, the relationship map (Appendix 4) was used to contrast past and present relationships. This method allowed for a temporal comparison across participants to clearly identify trends in the data. The relationship map addressed the central concept of social inclusion and how this manifests through the relationships each person has formed whilst working at the NCEC. Similarly, the use of the People Tree (Appendix 5) was used to draw out individual’s experiences of meaningful work, through self-identified moments of changing perceptions of self-worth and accomplishment (Ackerman et al 2016). Furthermore, the use of the People Tree created a new form of engagement, helping members to think “differently about issues” and elicited “information which would possibly have remained unknown otherwise” (Bagnoli 2009: 560).

The combination of methods allowed us to uncover stories of past and present turning points to map personal change (Ackerman et al 2016). To overcome the challenge of interpreting multiple data formats we created a hierarchy of methods based on the richness of data collected from each method. Triangulating data by using 2-3 methods per participants provided rigour to our analysis and allowed us to invalidate irrelevant data while improving the reliability (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006: 320).

We applied thematic analysis using a grounded theory approach to identify and describe both implicit and explicit themes within our data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). We used comparative analysis at each stage of the process to identify, compare and contrast themes across transcripts in order to understand the abstract social and personal processes within the data. Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the themes that emerged during our interview process. This allowed our conclusions to be grounded in and informed by the subjective feelings and lived experiences of members at the NCEC; an essential part of narrative research.

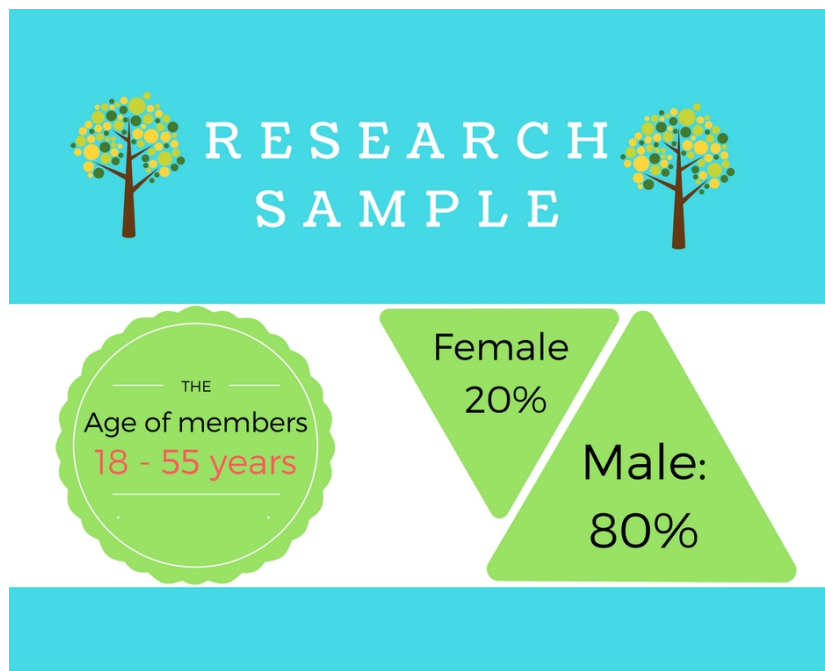
Figure 1: Visual representation of emergent themes



Sampling strategy and recruitment

The NCEC currently has twenty-six members with an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness, of which six members are female and twenty are male. The cooperative also has several other members that are involved in management roles in both the café and parks crew which do not have a disability. Members without an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness were not part of our research population. Eight interviews were conducted, four with workers of the parks crew and another four with workers at the Café, all of whom had an intellectual disability, learning difficulty or mental illness. The demographics of our selected sample are shown below.

Figure 2: Visual representation of our selected sample



After receiving UQ ethics approval for our proposed research, a self-selective sampling strategy was employed as a way to recruit participants to ensure that all were comfortable speaking to us. The participants were recruited via an open invitation overseen by the manager of the cooperative and social workers within the CLA. The research team first attended a cooperative meeting and introduced the project to promote the research project, answer any questions and address any concerns of NCEC members. Cooperative members contacted the manager of the NCEC or their social worker who then provided details of the participants who wished to be involved.

All participants' names along with other identifying content was de-identified after interviews had taken place in order to protect participant's privacy. Thus, all participants' names described in our findings are pseudonyms.

Limitations

Despite receiving UQ Ethics approval for our research protocol, the approval process caused delays in starting our fieldwork and thus we did not have as much time available as anticipated to conduct our fieldwork.

Despite using multiple methods in our interviews, participants occasionally struggled to understand the questions. This created a challenge for obtaining valid data, due to the issues surrounding leading questions.

After the first round of interviews there was an over-representation of men in our sample, we therefore sent out a second invitation for women to participate. As a result of this process one woman participated and made up a representative sample, while

seven of the interviews were conducted with males.

Findings and discussion

All interview participants feel that their work is meaningful, however this is manifested in different ways, as all their experiences are unique. We have therefore tried not to make generalisations regarding members' experiences and instead highlight how the cooperative facilitates a respectful, caring, democratic, encouraging and socially inclusive work environment with a focus on worker's participation. This environment makes work meaningful for members. The larger benefits that members have derived from being involved in the cooperative are discussed later with reference to current literature and the broader impacts that the NCEC has brought into their lives.

The positive elements of the cooperative for members

Members expressed many positive elements about the cooperative. Various themes emerged that relate to the research questions, and the following discussion will explore how the cooperative delivers outcomes for members and how members experience these outcomes. The ways in which meaningful work is co-created and the transformative effects that the people within the cooperative have on members' lives will also be discussed. Together our findings highlight how the cooperative network devotes the time to care for its members, to facilitate their needs, empower their voices and encourage their skills to be utilised. The cooperative structure, as well as the role of the supervisors and managers, were both found to play a key role in facilitating positive

worker experiences as discussed below.

Having a say

By 'making coffee to employ people', the NCEC reconstructs how workers are valued within their workplace. The mantra of the NCEC is an inversion of the normal profit-oriented idea of 'employing people to make coffee'. Therefore the emphasis on workers at the NCEC is primary. However, our findings indicated the degree of members' formal participation in the functioning of the NCEC, either on the board or through attendance at Annual General Meetings, was relatively irregular. Six participants did not comment on their involvement in the organisational structure of the NCEC. In addition, one participant stated it is not a priority, another was not aware of his membership and only one participant mentioned that they regularly attend AGM meetings. Therefore, the data suggests that members' involvement in the cooperative's formal decision-making processes is not of high priority to members. However, in members recounting their one on one casual meetings and check-ins with managers it appears that managers instead actively encourage members to have their say in more informal ways. These informal meetings between managers and workers provide a safe and comfortable environment for members to express their concerns as opposed to group meetings. There were no negative elements of the cooperative that members felt were important to them, and any need for change in their personal involvement in the cooperative was appeared to be facilitated by regular discussions with supervisors and managers. As Elliott, a worker at the café highlights:



“When you need help you can just ask them and talk to Richard or somebody and they can sit down and talk to you about it, and you really know that they’re listening.”

Daniel supported Elliot's sentiment by commenting that he catches up with the manager of the cooperative weekly, as a way for the manager to check in with him.

Three out of eight participants expressed that the managers and supervisors at the café and within the parks crew encourage members to speak up about their concerns and make decisions on behalf of themselves. This idea is expressed by Brett, a member of the parks crew, who raised the importance of having a say in the decisions of the cooperative as an organisation:



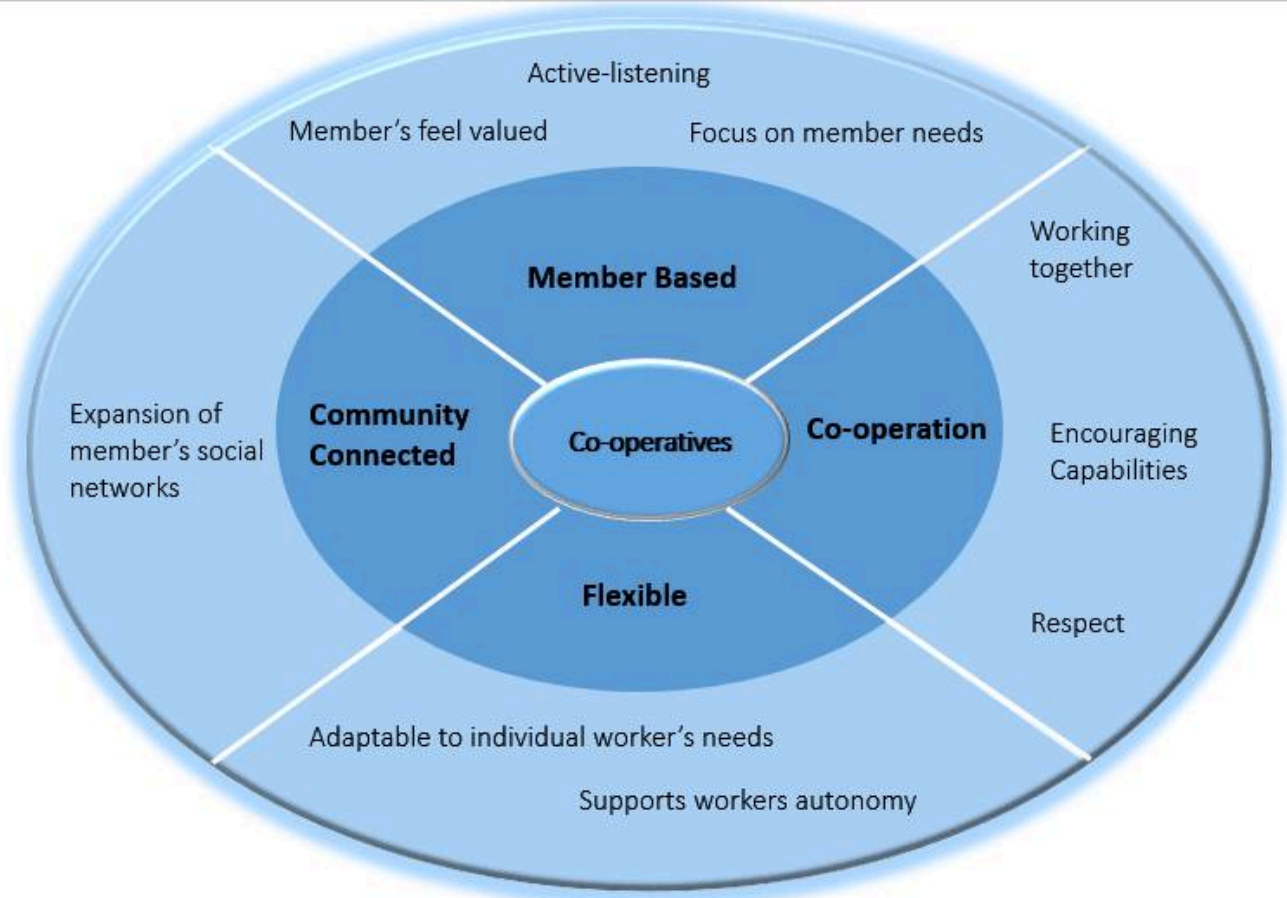
"I get to vote and have a part/say. Being a member, if I think something's not right I can put my hand up and say 'hey I disagree with this'."

This finding highlights that the cooperative facilitates worker's needs, as their voices are placed at the forefront of managers concerns. Allowing members to make decisions on their own behalf displays an awareness of the importance of self-expression and personal control.

A 'no-firing policy', which was developed by members, reflects members' enactment of ownership within the cooperative and how the democratic values of a cooperative serve to empower member's unique needs.

Figure 3 shown below offers a description of the core traits of cooperatives, such as being membership based, and how these traits can be seen to translate into positive outcomes for members.

Figure 3: Co-operatives as institutions hold a wide range of attributes that allow them to support their workers



Respect and care

Members feel like they are seen as individuals not just workers at the NCEC. This is an important factor in how, as a cooperative, the NCEC encourages their members to express and empower themselves.

Seven out of eight participants said they feel supported by their supervisors and managers. Although these impressions did vary in intensity according to different members, the participants stated that their supervisors/managers at the NCEC take time to care for their workers on a personal level. Members expressed that they are listened to and are encouraged to speak up through regular one on one meetings with the manager of the cooperative. For example, when Elliot focuses on key values such as respect, and getting help when needed:



“I wanted to find a job that I could fit in... basically find something that would help me with my disability...where I am here people really treat you like respect and that, and when you need help you can just ask them and talk to Richard or somebody and they can sit down and talk to you about it, and you really know that they’re listening...”

Although these interactions are casual, these simple words indicate a profound experience of being cared for at work.

Whilst members still respect their supervisors as figures of authority and leadership, six participants talked about their supervisors as mates and people who respect them for who they are. As Brett explained,



“He respects us for who we are, he treats us like who we are. You know, there’s no ‘oh you’ve got a disability, or you can’t do this’.”

The social barriers between boss and worker are seen to be less apparent here due to the caring attitudes of supervisors towards members. A close relationship between managers and employees cultivates an environment where members feel valued for who they are. These findings suggest that the complex needs of people with a mental illness, learning difficulty or intellectual disability can be met through this active-listening environment.

Supporting worker’s autonomy

The care and respect, as previously mentioned, which supervisors and managers show to workers is strongly linked to a flexible work environment that respects the limits of members’ capabilities while encouraging their participation. This can be seen in the following quote:



“He supports us in doing what we are doing. He stands back and all that, he just lets us do what we do. But if he sees that we’re taking the wrong track he’ll step in and say ‘do you think you’re doing the right thing here?’”

Brett’s statement shows how supervisors respect members’ capacity to solve situations and correct mistakes without intrusive instruction, thus supporting members’ autonomy. This finding also illustrates that when supervisors do step in to solve new problems, they engage in a ‘working with’ approach with the aim of creating an empowering work

environment. Clark, a member of the parks crew, reflects on the encouragement he receives from his supervisor: *“Boss like Ian tells you, you are doing a good job.”* For two participants, being able to reflect on their mistakes during a probation period was a significant part of this flexibility as it reaffirmed the employment focus of the cooperative. A non-hierarchical leadership style was also identified as creating a comfortable environment that for one member, extended to problem solving beyond the workplace, as expressed by Daniel: *“Because we work as a team, we work as partners.”*

The respectful and understanding attitudes of the supervisors towards disability opens up space for members to feel relaxed and comfortable while having control over their everyday work experience. Literature on the mechanisms to foster meaningful work for people with a disability are rare, however the behaviours of the supervisors clearly attempt to operationalise the values associated with meaningful work such as helping employees feel accepted, confident and happy. As Yeoman states, this process creates a work environment that gives purpose to those people’s lives (2014: 246).

A socially inclusive environment

Social exclusion means to be ‘shut out from society’ (Stancliffe, 2015; Morris, 2001). However a socially inclusive workplace has been developed by the NCEC that does not segregate but empowers people with a disability. Relationship maps depicting circles were utilised as a data collection technique to demonstrate the support networks that members had both prior to and after joining the NCEC organisation. Our findings demonstrate that the cooperative creates a socially inclusive environment where members can create friendships and other forms of generative relationships both in the

NCEC and the wider community. The relationship circles indicate that most participants expanded their social networks after they joined the NCEC. Most members spoke highly of the relationships they had built since starting at the NCEC.

Brett eloquently demonstrates the importance of having social networks:



“I’m just making it in my own world. And work has helped me do that, because at the end of the day, I’ve got networks...Now I can make it because I know there’s a couple of networks, in my life that I can rely on.”

It is evident that the cooperative provides an environment that fosters and builds social networks for its members. This socially inclusive environment is key to creating a supportive and enjoyable working environment for its members. The analysis of all eight interviews made clear that the relationships built between co-workers are both friendly and positive.

Daniel and Clark demonstrate that these relationships can turn into friendships outside of work, with Daniel stating, *“I met Nathan at the co-op and ended up getting along with him and ended up going to a show together.”* Clark supported this sentiment by adding, *“If you are having a bad day I’ll always cheer you up, and they always have a smile at the end of the shift.”*

In addition, George who works in the parks crew expressed how he experiences an inclusive environment at work by stating:



“Like you’re not doing a job, more like you’re getting to know someone while doing some hard labour. That’s fine, that’s what I look for in work. And this crew is definitely that.”

Furthermore, Allen, a worker in the café, demonstrates that social inclusion is not only happening within the workplace, but that the NCEC helps build a relationship bridge to the outside community of Nundah:



“But people who are in the Nundah community who come and have their coffee and get to know the people, it connects NCEC to the whole Nundah/Northgate community.... getting involved in the community and talking to people that I don’t know.”

These findings suggest that the cooperative provides a working environment where relationships within the community are of high importance and friendships formed at work can lead to time spent with each other outside of work.

However one participant’s experience showed divergence with these findings. Fiona stated, *“I don’t have time...I don’t have that flexibility that the other ones do. They go out, but I can’t go out.”* Fiona makes it clear that while she enjoys working with everybody she doesn’t have the same time outside of work to socialise and form closer relationships like the other members do. For Fiona, the work is more important for her than the relationships.

Finally, the NCEC creates a supportive and positive environment through the friendships and networks members make at work. In addition, the NCEC creates an outlet for members to connect with their wider community.

Members' experiences of meaningful work

The interview findings confirm how the literature frames experiences of meaningful work and the ways it can impact people's lives (Freedman & Fesko 1996; Leufstadius et al 2009; Dunn, Wewiorski & Rogers 2008). All interview participants spoke of experiences of past work that were unsupportive in comparison to the NCEC. When comparing these experiences, an overwhelming majority of members value the supportive balance of respect, care and autonomy offered by supervisors. The inclusive and supportive environment within the cooperative produces a meaningful work environment for all members that were interviewed. As a consequence of this, all participants expressed that this job has positively impacted their overall wellbeing.

This meaningful work environment fosters feelings of acceptance, equality and belonging, according to all participants. The community focus of both the café and the parks crew provides employees with a connection to their local community, and through this connection, they feel accepted for who they are. Half of participants expressly commented on the value they gain by interacting with their local community as a part of their job, and this has been highlighted as a way that meaningful work is fostered. Clarke expressed the feelings of pride he gains as a result of seeing how the community benefits from his work. He stated that he leaves work:



“Feeling good because you have done something for yourself and proud because you have done something for the community.”

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the NCEC provides members with employment that not only gives people work, but provides people with work that adds meaning to their lives.

The transformative effects of the cooperative on the lives of members

Our study has found that many people with disabilities or mental health issues struggle to find meaningful employment within the current employment model. All of our participants stated in one way or another that they either received no support from their past employers or that they “didn’t help me one bit”. This shows a clear trend within the disability community, of people struggling to find work that supports and understands them as people. In comparison, approximately seven out of eight of the workers we spoke to stated that their mental health had improved since they started working within the NCEC and that they have a much better relationship with their employers and co-workers than at their past jobs. For this reason one key theme that emerged in our data was ‘personal change’.

When expressing how his life has changed since working at the NCEC, three participants directly expressed that their mental and emotional health is much better than it was in previous jobs.

Daniel said he is doing *“a lot better in the head”*, while Brett supported this by saying:



“Now I’m just making it my own way, and instead of mum and dad getting 30 phone calls a day, they get five on a bad day... there was a long period of just hanging in there...surviving, not enjoying life as much. Now it's more enjoyment, being able to have those networks, socialise a bit more, have a better life, do the things that I want to do.”

Similarly, George highlighted that:



“I think I’m happy with the way everything’s going at the moment, I mean my life is going really well, my mental health has been stable, I’m really enjoying the work.”

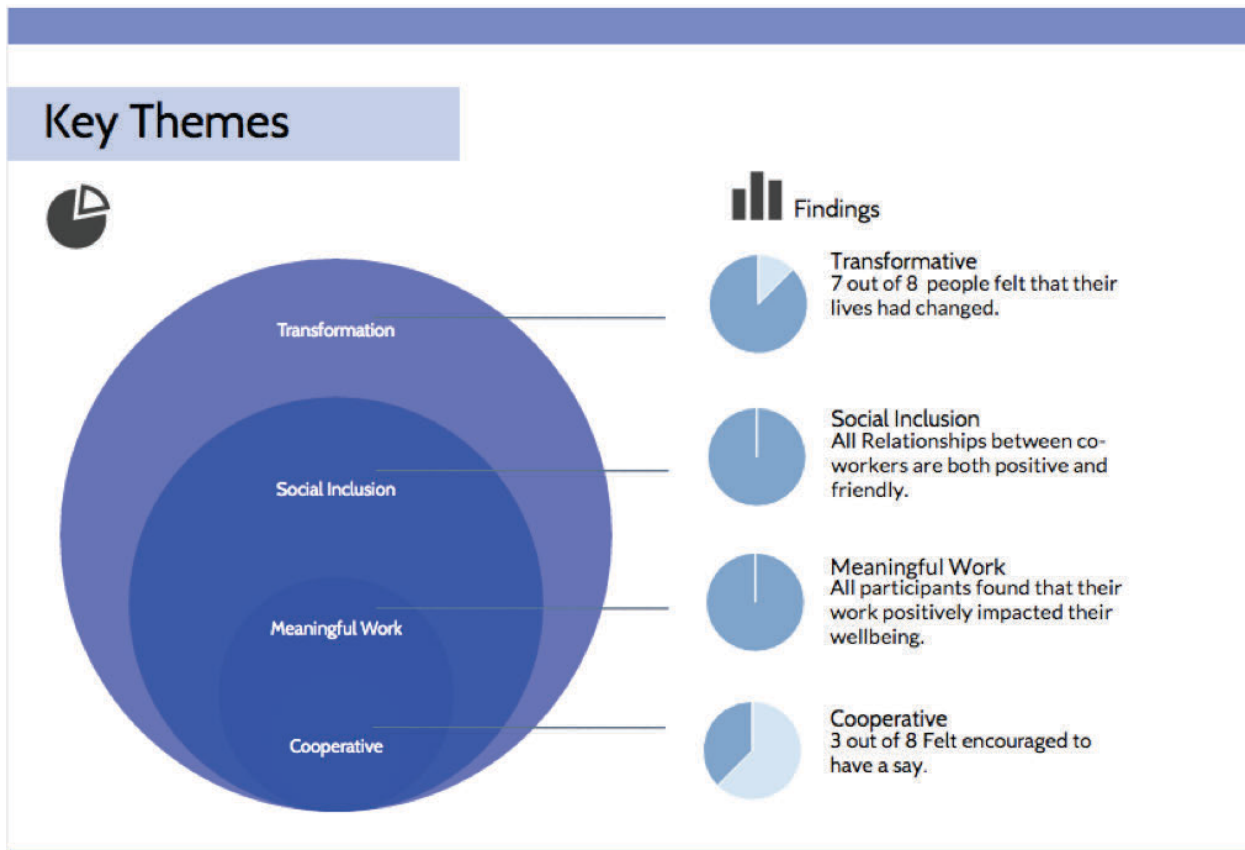
These stories of personal change and achievement were also reflected in the people trees that were used as method for documenting individual transformations. These findings show the transformative effects that meaningful work and social inclusion can have on someone’s life. As Brett stated, *“This job has helped me to become the person I am”*.

Their work at the cooperative has also given members goals for the future, not only in regards to working there but also within their own personal lives. Many members stated that they look forward to having more independence in the future, through the skills and networks that they have developed at the NCEC. Participants also stated that they would like to take on more roles within their work at the NCEC. For example Allan commented: *“Things like getting involved in the café, going shopping for them, delivery*

for them, wiping the tables, but I really want more cooking as well”, along with Daniel, “maybe needing an extra hand, or being a foreman and teaching people how to work”.

By providing a uniquely supportive work environment, the cooperative has managed to make its mark on members’ lives in transformative ways, by helping them to manage their disabilities, aspire to achieve future goals and to expand the scope of their lives. In figure four below we provide a summary of the key themes identified through our research of the lived experiences of NCEC members. The circles show how member’s transformations are experiences as a progression that evolves from the cooperative as a core function in their lives.

Figure 4. Visual representation of key themes from interviews



Recommendations and Conclusion

By understanding members' lived experiences of the NCEC, we confirmed that the cooperative model is a valuable form of employment for people with a disability, as it nourishes their sense of well-being, belonging and confidence. The NCEC focuses on the strengths of their members and supports them in learning new skills and achieving their goals. We recommend that the positive elements of this cooperative as outlined in our report remain a high priority for organisers and policy makers when considering the expansion or replication of NCEC practices.

Our research confirms that cooperatives have the ability to provide employment whilst not damaging worker's self-determination and autonomy, and proves that cooperatives can balance profitability without compromising on their worker's needs. The cooperative model, therefore, reduces the barriers that many people with disabilities face in open and competitive employment. Specifically, policies that aim to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities should strongly consider worker cooperatives as a way forward. This model's success also provides strong evidence for increased private venture investment in the cooperative movement due to its effectiveness as an employment provider.

Policy recommendations in light of National Disability Insurance Scheme

The way disability services are delivered is changing with the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which focuses on handing more choice and control over to people with disabilities. Controlled by their members, cooperatives

place their workers at the heart of their organisation. By being member owned, the NCEC cares and respects its workers in everything they do. This care and respect is what translates into worker's voices being listened to more closely and their autonomy being respected. Cooperative values therefore closely align with the choice and control for users which the NDIS promotes. This alignment in values of both cooperatives and the NDIS can potentially provide new opportunities in disability services and employment.

Recommendations of future research

A key recommendation for future research would be to explore the interconnection between the CLA support services and the NCEC. The services CLA provides were often named as valuable to members' confidence to raise changes and resolve conflict within the workspace. The CLA, as complementary support network for members of the NCEC, potentially enables more understanding and support for worker's personal lives and monitoring of their ability to work. We believe this is a unique partnership that warrants closer investigation.

Recommendations to board members of the NCEC

Due to the role of supervisors and managers being a positive element of the cooperative for members, it is recommended that the NCEC be able to clearly articulate for themselves what attitudes and skills they think help to create good supervisors and managers. We believe this is helpful knowledge for anyone wanting to replicate NCEC

practices as both supervisors and managers were found to play a large role in facilitating a meaningful work environment for the rest of their members.

The work environment at the NCEC fundamentally changes how the world of work is understood and practiced. Cooperatives should, therefore, not be underestimated in terms of the fresh potential that they hold for entrepreneurs and governments to alternatively deliver services. We congratulate the Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative on co-creating such an empowering and sustainable form of employment for their people.

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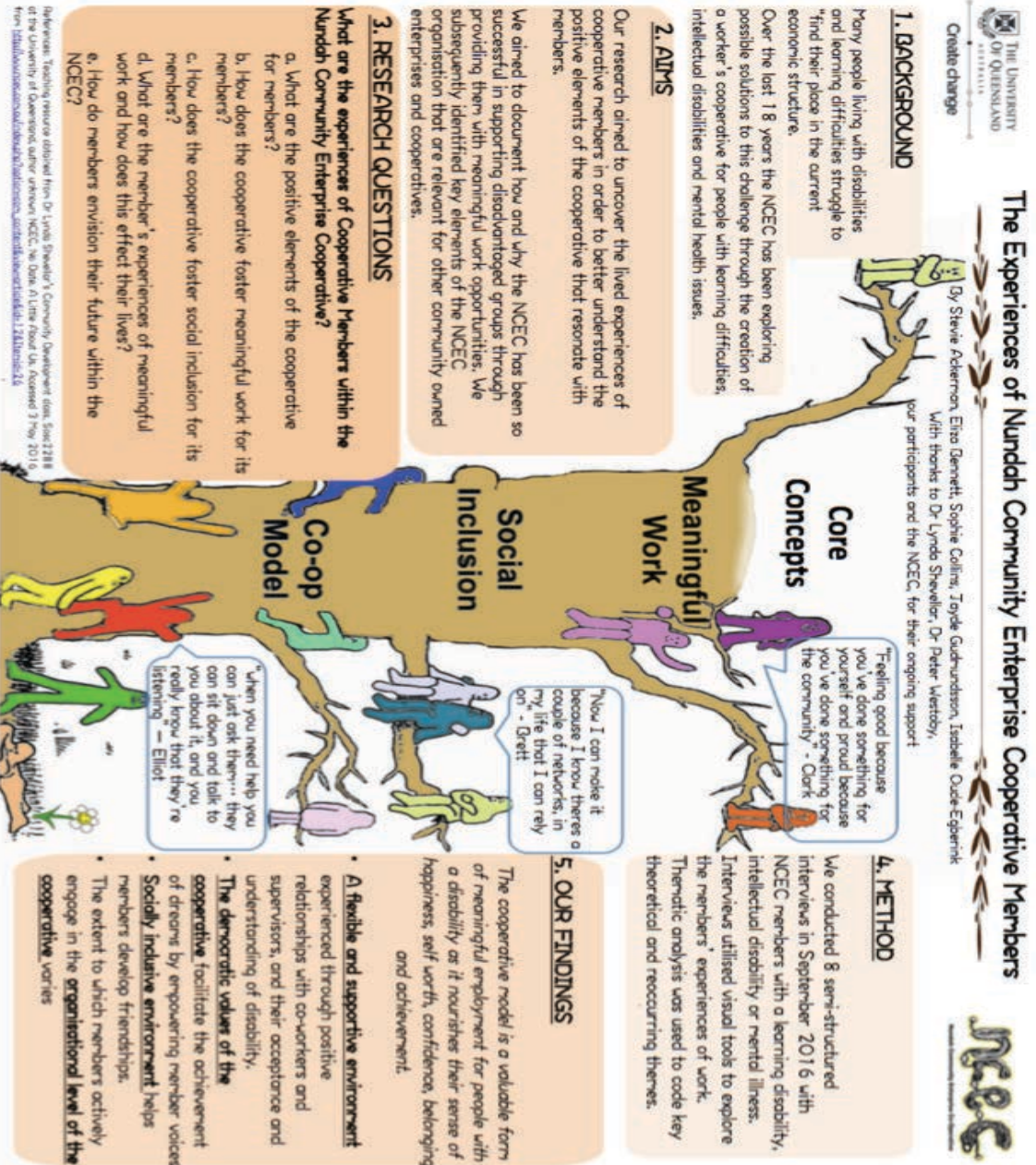
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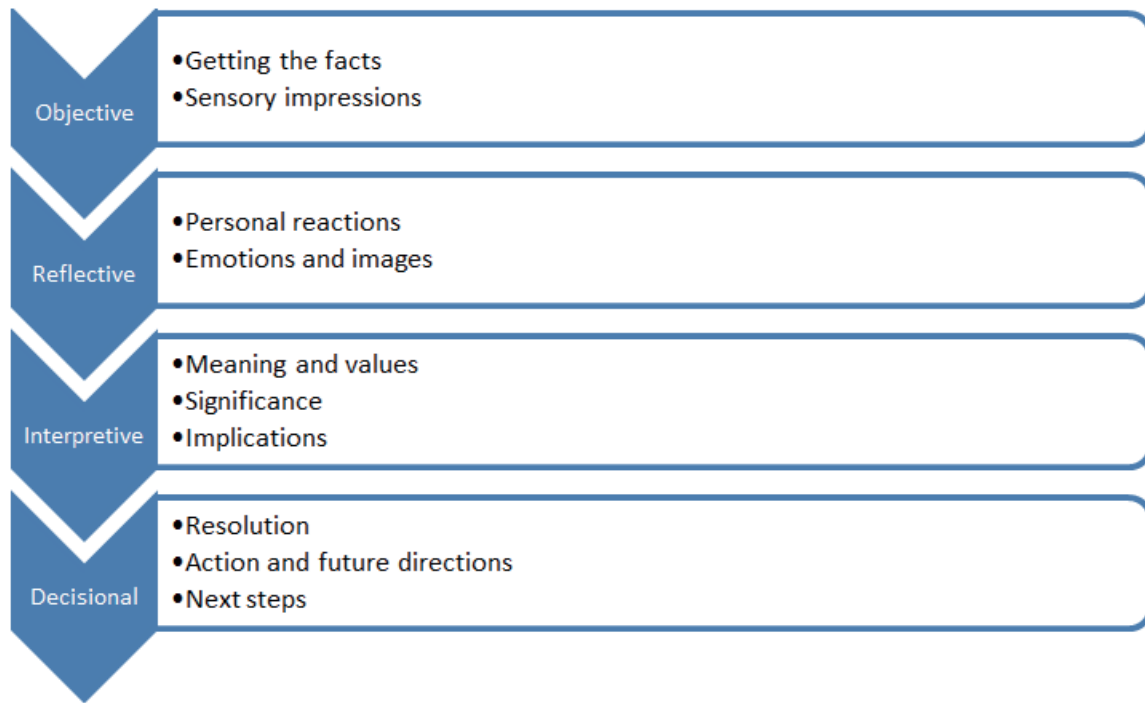
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Appendix 1. Visual representation of research project



Appendix 2: ORID Structure

Stakeholders Strategy Inc. 27 May 2012. Facilitators do it in groups. Accessed 12/05/16 from <http://www.stakeholder.ca/facilitators-do-it-in-groups>



Appendix 3: Interview guide using the structured conversation method

Research Question	Interview Prompt Questions
Introduction & background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How long have you worked here at NCEC? · How did you first hear about NCEC (café or some other program)? · What led you to working here? · How often do you work? · What sort of jobs/roles do you have at the coop? · How are you involved in the organisation of the co-op?
What are the positive elements of the cooperative for members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How do you feel about your job? · What parts of the work do you like the best? Why? · Is there anything you don't like as much? · What makes this workplace special?
How does the cooperative create social inclusion for its members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How do you feel about your co-workers? · Who do you enjoy working with the most here and why? · How much do you have to do with other members of the coop outside of work? (who? how?) <p>Relationship circles (Social inclusion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 'Can you mark in the circle where the people in your life fit now' · 'Can you mark in the circle who were in your life before you started working here?' · Can you tell me a little about these people? · How did you meet them? (probe for those met through or at the co-op and those met outside of NCEC?)
What are member's experiences of meaningful work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What work did you do before the NCEC? · How is working here different to your previous work?

<p>and how does this affect their lives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How does this job differ from other work that you've done? · What's an example of a new skill you have learned since you started working here? (technical or other (e.g. social, conflict resolution)) · How do you feel when you learn a new skill? · How has your life changed since you started working here?
<p>How does the cooperative help foster meaningful work for its members?</p>	<p>People tree (Meaningful work)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Can you colour in on the tree the person that represents how you feel now in your job? (seek explanations and elaborations) · Can you colour in on the tree the person that represents how you felt before you started at this job?' (seek explanations and elaborations) · Can you colour in on the tree the person you would like to be in a year's time? (seek explanations and elaborations) <p>Questions for allies present during interviews check permission from participant first</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What changes have you seen in X since they started working here? · How has this work affected your relationship with X? · What do you like about the Espresso Train? (Attempting to find out about the appeal of the NCEC/Co-op)
<p>How do members envision their future within the NCEC?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Are there any jobs at the cafe that you haven't learnt how to do but would like to do? · Do you have any goals for the future?

Appendix 4: Relationship circle

Inclusion Europe (2013). Relationship Map. Retrieved from http://www.inclusion-europe.com/topside/en/site_content/81-person-centred-planning-tools-eg-passion-audit-relationship-map/244-circles-of-support



Appendix 5: People Tree

Teaching resource obtained from Dr Lynda Shevellar's Community Development class, Sosc2288 at the University of Queensland, author unknown

