



COPE

Training Module 4 Challenges for cooperatives

Coompanion Östergötland, Sweden

COPE TRAINING MODULES GUIDELINES



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Preface

COPE Project's Intellectual Output 1 constitutes the main IO of the project's training content development phase. It consists of the production of an active and creative learning model which is designed to enable trainers in organisations managing entrepreneurship education to spread knowledge about cooperatives and motivate and prepare people for potential establishment of innovative cooperatives or other forms of social enterprises.

The present training Module corresponds to one of the project's Modules within COPE's training handbook.

The training handbook is based on the gap analysis findings. The partners collected information in three specific ways:

- by undertaking an analysis of the state of the art on existing methodologies adopted to promote cooperative models, which will provide solid ground and more knowledge about how to structure the learning methodology.
- by collecting good practices already implemented by partners at the local level. Good practices were collected with a common description form which was created by the partners and filled in by advisors and trainers.
- by interviewing trainers and experts in the field.

Its production was undertaken by Coompanion Östergötland, Sweden, one of the project's Partners.

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Camilla Carlsson
Norrköping, Sweden
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Contents

Preface	2
Introduction to the module's content and structure	3
How to keep members involved or engaged?	4
Exercise 1	5
Exercise 2	5
Exercise 3	6
How to ensure that there are committed members?	6
Exercise 4	7
Exercise 5	7
How to ensure that the members are aware of the benefit and impact they receive of being in a cooperative?	8
Exercise 6	8
Doing business with a cooperative	8
The challenges of collective work	10

Introduction to the module's content and structure

Each cooperative is unique as its members are individuals with their strengths, competences, and skills. However, any cooperative can face the same challenges. It is important to document experiences, collect cases and learn how management procedures can be improved. The fourth and last module of the COPE curriculum covers a range of well known challenges that traditional cooperatives are used to facing, both for newly established as well as well established cooperatives.

The learning outcomes of the fourth module include the following:

LEARNING OUTCOMES OF MODULE 4

Challenges for Cooperatives

Knowledge	
	Cooperation in entrepreneurial education
	Sustainable development and environmental protection
Skills	
	Using games and simulations to train
Competences	
	Collaboration between cooperatives
	Collaboration between cooperatives and other businesses



How to keep members involved or engaged?

It is often a challenge to get members involved. Many organisations either lose members as quickly as they recruit them, or struggle with keeping members active and involved. Poor member engagement can be a result of underlying conflicts, poor structures, long ineffective meetings, lack of transparency, poor delegation of responsibilities, poor appreciation of members' contributions, no room for growth, personal reasons, etc.

Conflict in a co-operative arises for the same reasons it happens anywhere – people have different views about what to do or how to do it, are subject to different pressures, and compete to get their ideas accepted by the team. Creating ground-rules together, i.e. a so-called [Group Agreement](#), a set of ground rules that members agree to follow. It is a hands-on method that helps to prevent conflicts, and that does not involve many resources.

It is important to have committed members in order to stimulate the democratic process. Here are some general tips to how overcome challenges regarding member engagement:

Tips:

- People are motivated by results. Share the impact of your cooperative. Members get more engaged once they can see that their actions carry significance and have the potential to make a difference.
- Run an inventory of skills and experiences present in the cooperative. Decide collectively in a democratic way on responsibilities and tasks, team new members up with more experienced ones to ensure that everyone feels useful and valued.
- Hold introduction sessions for all new members. It helps to understand the organisation and how it works. Can also be useful for other members in order to refresh and/or revise and update a set of rules and principles of how the cooperative is run.
- Run regular short meetings (pulse-sessions*) for all members to spot early conflicts/dissatisfactions, to identify if someone has felt being excluded or ignored.
- Organise social events for members such as fikas (coffee-breaks), picnics or outings. Socialising brings people together and motivates engagement.
- Thank people in meetings for work done. Being recognized and appreciated by others for their time and effort is an important motivational factor.
- Structure your meetings so that they are exciting, and everyone gets a chance to participate.
- Members of the Board should spend time talking with members and getting to know them.

Exercise 1

1 trainer, other group members are participants.

Purpose: get to know each other and to run an inventory of skills, experiences and competences present in the cooperative.



Physical meeting: Write the task on a white board, alternatively on a sheet of paper and distribute a copy each. Time: 5 - 7 minutes, or depending on the need.

Task: I bet you didn't know this about me:

.....
.....

I am good at (list 3 - 5 skills, things you are good at, e.g. accounting, networking, baking, photo, reaching out, fundraising, etc).
Collect papers once everyone is ready. Read out loud and ask the group to guess who the author is. Write a short summary of qualities and interesting facts on a white board.

Digital meeting: Create a Google-template with the questions above. Ask everyone to answer the questions and submit their forms. Share the results with everyone and discuss.

Alternative: Create two separate Menti- questionnaires, and run each part separately, with discussion and reflections following after each part.

Exercise 2

1 trainer, other group members are participants.

Purpose: socialising, getting each other better, establishing good friendly relations in a collective.

Physical meeting: Organise a coffee-break with appetisers. Either prepare yourself, or ask those in a group who can bring something with them. Order a couple of sets of [More Than One Story](#) cards. Begin with a short presentation of each player. The oldest participant starts by pressing "new question" and reads the question out loud. The player then tells a story. The others listen actively and may encourage the story-teller by asking questions. When the storyteller is done, the game continues clockwise.

Digital meeting: You can play online just like you would in person, using any video communication platform. Assign someone who keeps track of whose turn it is and who shares their screen to show the questions.

Tips for trainers: groups of four to eight people work best in person, whereas four to six people work best online. About 40 minutes to an hour is a good amount of time to play.

How to ensure that there are committed members?

Tips:

- Ensure there are different levels of engagement. A person may start by observing only, then progress through various stages, getting more involved. Too much responsibility in the beginning may pull people away.



- Explore the personal and external reasons why people become members of your co-op. How many potentially committed members are there at the moment? Run an anonymous member survey online or physically.
- Understand what matters to the members. Participation is personal – people’s involvement is intimately linked to who they are and what matters to them.
- Do people enjoy an activity and why? Ask in an anonymous survey and share the result with others. People are committed as long as they enjoy it, have time, they feel that can make a difference.
- Make sure everyone has a forum to express their opinions. Sometimes the ones who are in the centre of attention are not the most committed ones.
- Make sure members like and respect other members they participate with. Social interactions and short pulse-meetings are important.

Exercise 3

1 trainer, other group members are participants

Question: How much time are you able to invest? What responsibility can you think of taking in the cooperative? What would you like to contribute with? Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. (5 - 7 min)

Physical meeting: ask everyone to write their answers on a piece of paper. Can be either anonymous or personal.

Collect all the answers. Put them on one table.

Ask the participants to use another sheet of paper and write down what competences/services (e.g. book-keeping system, accounting, marketing etc) make a successful cooperative.

Collect all the answers. Put them on another table.

Ask the participants to match sheets from two tables. Identify competences/services that are missing at your cooperative. Reflect in a group.

Digital meeting: ask everyone to use a computer or a phone.

Create a Google-template with the questions above and email to everyone.

Ask participants to use Menti to answer a question on what competences/resources make a successful cooperative.

Compare with your cooperative and reflect.

Exercise 4

1 trainer, other group members are participants.

Purpose: to find out how satisfied members are with what they do and whether they feel responsibility. People are committed as long as they enjoy it, have time, they feel that can make a difference.



Physical meeting: ask each participant to reflect and describe the best activity they have done in a cooperative, an activity they enjoyed doing, and an activity they feel they would enjoy doing.

Collect answers, arrange and summarise for the group.

Reflect and discuss in a group. Make a list of activities that have been enjoyed mostly, and activities that participants would like to be engaged in.

Digital meeting:

Create a questionnaire in Zoom, send out to participants. Let participants reflect and answer (5 min). Summarise and share the results online. Discuss and reflect. Make a list of activities that have been enjoyed mostly, and activities that participants would like to be engaged in.

How to ensure that the members are aware of the benefit and impact they receive of being in a cooperative?

Tips:

- Run regular short meeting (pulse-sessions*) for all members to update on current achievements and challenges, as well as the impact done by the cooperative.
- Invite all members to bigger meetings (e.g. month, quarter, annual). Have regular short sessions with a focus on the benefit of being in the cooperative. Make sure all members have access to reports and other data regarding their membership and benefits of being in a cooperative (e.g. Google-drive, hand-outs, short surveys to check awareness etc).
- Encourage all members to get involved in projects and campaigns.
- Brochures and hand-outs.
- Newsletter: if your cooperative has a possibility, organise a newsletter and decide on periodicity (e.g. weekly, monthly etc.), decide who will be responsible for the newsletter.
- Social media: start an account on social media where you can tell a story of your cooperative.

Exercise 5

1 trainer, other group members are participants

Question: What benefit and impact do you receive from being in a cooperative? (5 - 7 min)

Physical meeting: Please, write on a piece of paper what benefits you, as a member, have experienced of being in a cooperative. Fold the paper and put it in a box. Try to write down 3 things on three separate paper sheets. Tips for trainers: depending on a cooperative, try to narrow down the time-frame. E.g. within the past 6 months, 1 year, 3 years etc.

Trainer takes the box with all the papers, reads them out loud one by one.

Group answers, discuss and reflect.



Digital meeting: Create an online survey in Zoom, send out to participants. Let participants reflect and answer (5 min). Summarise and share the results online. Discuss and reflect.

Doing business with a cooperative

1. In Sweden, it is a challenge to get financing and loans to cooperatives where members have the opportunity to go in and out of ownership without being tied to X number of shares.
2. The company form "Ekonomisk förening", which is the most common form in Sweden for cooperatives, does not require the Swedish Tax Agency / Swedish authorities to submit their annual reports, so the banks do not have the opportunity to make credit reports on them. This makes banks worried about who takes the loan and how strong the cooperative is financially. This often means that cooperatives do not receive loans from ordinary banks without guaranteeing large parts of the loan. It then becomes especially vulnerable if there are 10 members, but only 4 have the financial means to go on bail.
3. Therefore, we in Sweden have unified forces in the cooperation and created credit guarantee associations and our own cooperative banks that are more positive about stimulating cooperatives. One such example is Mikrofonden West. In Sweden, there is an alternative to AB (limit company) called SVB, which is a form where the dividend is limited and therefore often fits better into cooperative ideas and sometimes when you get tax money that must not go to the shareholders but must be reinvested in the business, which many of the cooperative operations have in their statutes. Trading with a cooperative is no different from other companies.

Here are some general tips to how approach challenges regarding getting financing and loans:

- Run an inventory of all possible financing opportunities. Grant, loan, project, community investment, crowdfunding, pro-bono, sponsorship etc? Ideally, your business should not be dependent on just one source of finance.
- Aim at a combination of three sources: partnership with a private company (in any form) may be a very attractive factor if you decide on approaching a bank for a loan or reaching out to other companies; a project or grant may show you as a reliable cooperative; any pro-bono help (e.g. consultancy) may help to extend your contacts and spread the word about your cooperative.
- Crowdfunding: [Crazy Pictures](#), a film cooperative from Norrköping, is one of success-stories on how local citizens have supported a local initiative.

The challenges of collective work



COMMON GOALS AND COMMON INTEREST

It is a challenge to make the democratic process work for members to accept that you can't always get your way and that all members are jointly and severally liable for the cooperative's activities.

It can also be difficult to get members to participate and try to influence the system if they feel that their voice is not heard more than once a year at the annual meeting, or that the board does not listen to its members during the year they are elected.

Another challenge is the leadership of a cooperative, it requires democratic and listening leadership that creates participation and utilises all the resources and networks of the members to benefit the cooperative's activities.

- A clear division of labour and common goals.
- Leadership that creates security, inclusion and community as your clear rules and distributes responsibility – it creates motivated members.
- Order and order of meetings, well-thought-out structure, members should feel needed.
- Conflicts that are properly used lead to development for the cooperative.
- Clear decision-making processes are important for feeling involved and influenced.

