

Managing the Co-operative Advantage

Workshop for the United States Federation of Worker Co-operatives
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There are basic information and assumptions that underlie this workshop.

1. Market research shows that people have a generally positive image of co-operative business but that their knowledge is thin.
2. If a co-op has no co-operative difference neither the members nor the community need it.
3. Bankrupt co-ops do not meet member or community needs.
4. As people learn more about co-operative business they like it because coop values and principles resonate with the best that is human.
5. If the co-operative lives its values support is strong, but if it does not, reaction to the co-op is more negative than if it were 'value free', with some possible flow over to all co-ops.
6. Number 5 is true of members whether they are consumers or workers and extends to a wider range of stakeholders.
7. For a co-operative business to fully benefit from its business structure, managers to be able to fully understand, believe, create and measure the co-operative difference.
8. Co-operative businesses succeed because of their values and often fail when they drift away from them.

This workshop is focused on the unique challenges of managing a co-operative business. Co-operatives differ significantly from investor-owned business in that they have a different purpose, strong value and principle expectations, and more than one bottom line. Many of the 'business solutions' that work for investor owned business simply do not work or are not appropriate for co-operative business. Little is written or researched about co-operatives from a business perspective. In business schools there are very few courses about co-operative business. Co-operative managers have a daunting challenge and few resources compared to their counter parts in investor-owned companies.

We will explore how coops and co-op managers:

- Understand the difference between cooperative and other business,
- believe the difference to be of value or not,
- create the difference in their businesses
- Measure the difference