



“The whole is greater than the sum of parts”

Aristotle

WORKING AS A COOPERATIVE

Welcome to Step 4!

It is time to start to get into the depth of your coop working project!

Once you identified your project (step 1), designed your cooperative strategy (step 2) and organised how you will work together (step 3), now it is time to pass to action.

IMPORTANT : this step is mostly intended for projects that are effectively carried out! It will be slightly less useful for projects that are intended to stay just on “virtual” grounds.

The objectives of step 4 are:

- To reflect on the opportunities and the challenges of **team work** in real life situations and identify strategies that will enhance your team performances
- To learn some simple tools that will help you to **keep your project in track** and record all its progresses
- To learn how cooperatives decide to **share the profit** they generate with their activities.

As usual, we propose you a full range of activities and tools: it is up to you to choose what to test and practice with your students.

Team work ('60 min)

The work of a team (teamwork) is a fundamental aspect of the good functioning of a cooperative. The capability of working in team concretely impacts the results, the economic success, the innovation and the possibilities of growth of a cooperative business. In addition, teamwork is an aspect that shall be constantly enhanced and nourished during the life of your coop working project: if it easy to efficiently work in team at the beginning of your project, your sense of teamwork can encounter challenges with the passing of time. This often happens as the result of the fact that, after years, group members might experience different levels





of motivation and have their visions diverging from the original ones. This is an element complicating the natural condition of the team itself, a group of people with different ambitions, way of thinking and approaches to the different tasks they need to carry out. Taking this in mind, teamwork is a fundamental aspect to create conditions for dialogue and always work to gather people around the same goal beyond the natural human differences.

As part of this step, you will find an entire document completely focusing on teamwork (**STEP 4- FOCUS POINT – TEAMWORK**), in order to help the participants to the coop working project to face opportunities and risks of the group dynamics, and to help improving them when it is necessary.

We suggest you to read this all together or in small groups, and then let spontaneously emerge, in a *circle time* modality, the students' reflections. In this way, students will be free to express their fears, negative criticisms and positive inputs related to the activity and to the group climate.

For the circle time activity, participants are supposed to seat in circle, so that each team member can see and be seen by all the other ones. Please leave an empty space in the middle of the circle. The communication shall occur according to rules that have been shared since the beginning; these rules are finalized to promote active listening and everybody's participation. The rules that need to be set are:

- never interrupt who is talking or judge someone else's opinion
- always ask to talk by raising your hand
- listen to the opinion of all the members who wish to have their say on a topic.

The circle time shall be guided by a facilitator, a teacher or a member within the group with good mediation skills. In the circle time, you can also face delicate issues concerning participants' emotional aspects and group dynamics. During this kind of experience you can also openly share expectations, fantasies and fears that often circulate in a hidden way.

Monitor your functioning as a cooperative (minimum '60 min)

Through step 3 you created different work teams, coordinated by the members' assembly, according to the functions and the need of you coop working project.

In worker cooperatives, teams usually self-organise their work: that means that once the Assembly decides the objectives, members of teams are free to autonomously decide how to organise their work in order to achieve them, how to distribute tasks, roles and responsibilities.

This is a powerful and an effective mechanism since it fosters participation, autonomy, motivation and creativity in team members, but it relies on good coordination and communication skills across the whole organisation. If communication and coordination are poor, the effective mechanism can turn into chaos.





In order to foster communication and coordination within the team, it is important that the cooperative assembly periodically meets (we suggest at least once every month). During these meetings, every team informs the assembly about its progresses and problems: it is very important that the information and the knowledge are synthetic, clear and easy to understand by every member, so that the assembly can run smoothly and be more effective.

Here, we propose you a couple of templates that can help each team to monitor its activities and organise the information to be shared during the members' meetings. In particular the templates refer to the cooperative's:

- Operative functioning
- Financial functioning

Operational functioning

Before starting to operate each team can use this simple template (**STEP 4 – TFS 1 – PLAN TEMPLATE**) to agree on the results to achieve and to organise the tasks necessary to accomplish them.

The advantage of this template is that is not 'done' once and for all: each team must update it before every meeting to monitor and evaluate the progresses made and the obstacles met, as well as to adapt it according to the real evolution of the project.

Hence, we suggest you either to use it in digital format, so that it can be easily updated and showed through a Data Show during the assembly meetings. Otherwise, you can also replicate it on a whiteboard or on a big white sheet (A1 or A2 size), where you can update it by sticking new post its.



Financial functioning

Important Warning : Coolab is thought as an educational project, whose aim is not to constitute a real cooperative, but rather to run a participative and cooperative project in a real setting.

Hence, there are no real payments that can be demanded in exchange for the services or goods provided by your virtual project. The treatment of any money you would receive from third parties should be examined and decided with your teacher, your trainer, the third parties you work with, among them the customers and the bank of your choice. In this case, this money should be entered according to the legal rules for the accounting of economic movements in your country

May you decide to legally constitute a cooperative from this educational project with a legal status and fiscal identification code, you would have to do it according to your national legislation.



Moreover, we warn you about avoiding putting in place activities that for their nature or conditions are subjected to public or health authorisations or licenses (such as selling food or providing public services) or that can be potentially dangerous for users or consumers.

Things you should know before starting :

unlike shareholders in conventional enterprises, cooperative members have equal voting rights regardless the amount of share capital subscribed (one member, one vote), which can be symbolic or substantial;

the share capital made of members' contributions is only a part of the capital of a cooperative. The reserves (resulting from the allocation of annual surpluses) are also part of the capital (own funds);

in a cooperative, annual surpluses are reinvested within the company and not used to remunerate shareholders (like it happens in conventional enterprises). Members may decide to allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves; benefiting members through returns; and supporting any other activities approved by the membership;

cooperative financial reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible, allow measures oriented towards the long-term, such as investment in innovation, technology, etc. In some countries, these reserves are made indivisible by law. In such cases, they are a collective property transmitted from generation to generation to the members of the cooperative and, in case of dissolution or liquidation of the cooperative, they can be used for the development of other cooperatives;

the returns to worker-members are based on the work done (an adjustment of the of their remunerations). This financial instrument could be object of misunderstandings: actually, it is not a rent or a return on investment, but an adjustment of the price of the transactions between the cooperative and its members (the work done, precisely);

unlike shareholders in conventional enterprises, a cooperative member who leaves the cooperative receive a "limited compensation" on the share capital initially subscribed: the nominal value of the share (its value at the moment of the subscription) plus the cost of inflation (like for a bank interest).

In **STEP 4 – TFS 2 – FINANCE REPORT** we provide a simple template to help the team to monitor the finances of your coop working project. In step 2, you elaborated an estimation of your project incomes and expenses (**STEP 2 – TFS 5 – FINANCIAL PLAN**): now the finance team can use this template to record all the economic movements of the coopworking project.

Every income and expense shall be registered with a corresponding document that shall indicate:

The exact amount of money received or paid by the cooperative project

The object, i.e. the specific cause for receiving the money (donation or voluntary





contribution to the project) or for spending it (purchase of materials, rent of equipment, etc...).

The date of the transaction

The parties involved in it: one is always the cooperative project, the other will change every time

Depending on its nature, your coop working project might receive voluntary contributions or donations to support its products or services. If this is the case, you should register every income by providing a facsimile of a receipt to your clients, as you can see in [STEP 4 – TFS 3 – RECEIPT FACSIMILE](#)

The finance team must keep all the documents ordered and at the disposal of all coop members.

If the cooperative members keep updated the template provided, periodical members meetings will be more effective, interesting and easier to be carried out.

It is important that the issues to be discussed in the meeting are decided and communicated to all members in advance. Usually, the Coop. President presides over the members' meetings and nominates a Secretary of the meeting that must take note of the issues discussed and of the decisions taken.

The Members' Assembly is a sovereign body taking part in the fundamental deliberations essential for the cooperative life. All members are part of it, in accordance with the Statute provisions. The Members' Assembly approves the social and economic balance, elects the social offices and plans the social activity.

There is also another kind of assembly, easier and more operative, which can be set more often and informally in comparison to the General Assembly: the Operational Daily Meeting.

We provide you now a simple template of an Operational Daily Meeting Minutes that can be used for this purpose. ([STEP 4 – TFS 4 – OPERATIONAL DAILY MEETING MINUTES](#)).

What did we learn? ('20 min)

Here you have an interactive quiz to test participants' learning about the topics covered in step 4. It is fun and interactive!

Then, here is a summary of the main learning points of step 4 to help you keep on track during the journey. [STEP 4 – LEARNING POINTS RESUME](#).





| TIME | CONTENT | ACTIVITY - METHODOLOGY | RESOURCES | MATERIALS | SKILLS DEVELOPED | COOP PRINCIPLES RELATED |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| 60' | Teamwork | Exposition - Lecture in different groups or all together Group discussion in a circle time modality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STEP 4 – FOCUS POINT - TEAMWORK | Print the focus point (one copy per each group) or project it with a Data Show | Analysis and reflection | Education, training and information |
| Min 60' | Monitor your functioning as a coop : Operative and financial functioning | Exposition - Lecture Group review and discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STEP 4 – TFS 1 – PLAN TEMPLATE • STEP 4 – TFS 2 – FINANCE REPORT • STEP 4 – TFS 3 – RECEIPT FACSIMILE • STEP 4 – TFS 4 OPERATIONAL DAILY MEETING MINUTE | Print the empty template of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFS 1 – PLAN TEMPLATE, • TFS 2 – FINANCE REPORT, • TFS 3 – RECEIPT FACSIMILE Markers Calculate Data show | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self – organisation skills • Planning skills • Critical sense • Evaluation skills • Analysis skills • Communication and Coordination • Precision • Accounting • Decision-making • Democratic participation • Working together | Member economic participation Autonomy and independence Democratic Member Control |
| 20' | What did we learn? | Group reflection Coop-game | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STEP 4 – LEARNING POINTS SUMMARY • Coopgame | Internet connection | | |
| Total time minimum 140' | | | | | | |