

Co-op Curricula Module 1: Democracy in the Workplace — Rights & Responsibilities

Materials:

- Post-it notes
- Markers
- Sticky flip-chart paper
- Pens
- Paper or journals

Essential Questions:

- Why are rights and responsibilities important in our workplace democracy?
- What are the essential rights and responsibilities in our co-op?
- How do rights and responsibilities relate to the cooperative principles and values?
- What does it take to exercise or advocate for our rights so that our workplace can be a democracy?

Essential Learnings:

- I understand how democratic rights and responsibilities can lead to the integration of social, economic, and business success.
- I understand the link between exercising my rights in a workplace democracy and living the cooperative values.
- As a worker-owner, my actions demonstrate and illuminate the democratic rights and responsibilities that I have in the workplace.
- I understand that our co-op bill of rights should be a living document
- I know how to advocate for others' rights in a workplace democracy.

4 Pillars:

- **Accountable Empowerment:** Recognition and fostering of rights within the co-op helps ensure a healthy balance of power and accountability.
- **Democracy:** Alignment and shared understanding among individuals of their own and others' rights in the co-op.

3 Concepts:

- **Linkage:** Recognition and fostering of rights within the co-op promotes interlocking of co-op and member interests.

Agenda:

Welcome everyone into the space and thank them for their participation. Review & Recommit to Public Agreements.

Context setting

Co-ops embody business as a social institution

- *Governed by personal rights and personal will*
- *Ownership is membership*
- *Governance rights derived from membership rights*
- *Rights can't be transferred*
- *Even if you delegate power to managers, you still retain your own power*
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Rights framework is important for this.

Activities

Ask: Why are rights important in a social institution?

Possible answers:

- *We rely on our work for our livelihood*
- *Balance of power*
- *Come to work as whole person*
- *Dignity*

Explain:

What is necessary to support rights in a democratic workplace?

1. Know your rights
2. Exercise your Rights
3. Advocate for your rights and others' rights
4. Understand mechanisms that ensure rights are fulfilled

One way to know if rights are being supported in your democratic workplace is noticing the balance of power:

Ask:

What are some signs of unequal power?

Possible answers:

- *Lack of communication*
- *Lying*
- *Assuming what a colleague wants*
- *Putting someone down*
- *Making decisions alone*
- *Blaming*

- *Not taking responsibility*

What are some signs of equal power?

Possible answers:

- *Open and honest communication*
- *Practicing consent*
- *Valuing each other's opinions*
- *Accepting responsibility*
- *Admitting to mistakes*
- *Sharing responsibility*

Let's brainstorm a list of things that we think make up a healthy democratic workplace.

Possible answers:

- *Communication*
- *Respect*
- *Trust*
- *Participation*

Give participants a copy of the sample Worker Co-op Bill of Rights

What similarities and differences do you see to the list you came up with?

In small groups, consider these questions in the context of the brainstorm and the Bill of Rights:

- How would these rights and responsibilities be important or useful in your co-op? In what kinds of situations?
- How might rights and responsibilities support you, or not, to come to work as your full self?
- How might rights and responsibilities support, or not, the success of the co-op?
- What would you change about or add/remove from these rights and responsibilities to make them most relevant to your co-op?
- What are the critical rights and responsibilities in your co-op? Write these on post-its.

Ask each group share out its findings with the larger group - document a list of rights and responsibilities that emerge.

How is what we just discussed different to what you have experienced in non-cooperative organizations? Why do you think that is?

Prompt for:

- *The difference is that we have the cooperative principles and values to guide our work*

Have the ICA principles and values on chart paper around the room - have the group place their rights/responsibilities post-its on the principle where they think it best fits.

Debrief

1. Know your rights
 - a. How do the co-op principles and values support and reflect your ability to exercise your rights in the co-op?

2. Exercise your rights
 - a. What are examples of when you've advocated for your rights in the co-op?
 - b. How do you know if you have enough power to exercise your rights?
 - i. Possible answers:
 - There are forums for your opinion to be heard
 - You can express dissenting opinions
3. Advocate for your rights and others' rights
 - a. How can you support people in exercising their rights?
4. Understand mechanisms that ensure rights are fulfilled
 - a. What structures or processes would you need to be able to do this?

Individual Writing Reflection

- How do you think a framework for rights and responsibilities could make your workplace different to the way it was before?
- What shifted for you?
- What new insights do you have about your rights and responsibilities as a member of the co-op?
- How might you advocate for others' rights in the co-op? How would you like them to advocate for yours?

Pair and share your insights with a partner.

References/Facilitator Resources:

<http://www.ownershipassociates.com/>

2nd Principle: <https://ica.co-op/sites/default/files/attachments/Guidance%20Notes%20EN.pdf>

Pinchot, G. & Pinchot, E. (1994). *The End of Bureaucracy and the Rise of the Intelligent Organization*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.