

Group Exercise

This exercise is attributed to Dr John R. Whitman and is taken from 'Introduction to the Course on Cooperatives' which can be accessed at <http://cooperative-curriculum.wikispaces.com/>.

Topic

Introduction to Co-operatives

Aim

To introduce participants to the first two co-operative principles; open and voluntary membership and democratic member control.

Description

This is a group-based, creative exercise that challenges participants to organise and manage themselves based on the principles of openness and democracy.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the relevance and importance of open and voluntary membership.
- Understand the relevance and importance of democratic member control.
- Demonstrate creativity and organisational skills.

Time & Materials

Time:

Approximately 10-20 minutes depending on how in depth the facilitator wishes the discussion to be.

Materials:

At the discretion of the facilitator.

Scenario

Two students must form a group each (four to five in each group) and organise themselves appropriately in order to complete a task. The task can be decided by the facilitator or the students. Allow five to six minutes for the students to organise themselves and a similar length of time to decide on and carry out the task.



Conducting the Exercise

1. Ask for two volunteers, and place one to your right and the other to your left. Tell the one on the left that he or she is the CEO of Apex Company and needs to hire (pick) four other students as employees.
2. Tell the one on your right that he or she is starting up the Combo Cooperative and must ask the students for any willing members who want to join the cooperative as equal members, stopping when four other students have joined.
3. Tell the CEO to unilaterally think up an activity on his or her own to engage the employees, and then instruct the CEO to tell the employees to undertake that activity.
4. Tell the Cooperative group to decide amongst themselves what activity they want to engage in and then execute it. Give the teams about five minutes to get their acts together and another three or so minutes to demonstrate their activities.
5. Halt the exercise and conduct the discussion segment.

Discussion topics

1. How did you feel about what you just did?
2. Was everyone happy to be on his or her team?
3. Was everyone consulted about what to do and how to do it?
4. Did everyone feel that their situation gave them the best opportunity to contribute their best ideas?

Inform the class that this exercise just demonstrated the first two ICA principles of co-operatives: Voluntary and Open Membership, and Democratic Member Control.

Additional ideas

- Set up more groups to take part in the exercise in order to obtain more feedback.
- Provide a specific task for the groups to complete.
- Try and adapt this exercise to explore other co-operative principles e.g. member economic participation.

