

Case Study 4.3

Suma Wholefoods

Triangle Wholefoods Collective Limited, trading as Suma Wholefoods, is the UK's largest worker co-operative (where the members of the business are employees). Based in Elland, near Halifax, the company has over 120 members and a turnover of £25m. Not only do the worker-members collectively own the company and have the right to participate in a share of the profits generated, they also act as the ultimate governing body in the business through a non-hierarchical management structure.

Democratic governance

The organisation has a two tier structure for governance, with the members electing a Management Committee at the Annual General Meetings (AGM). The Management Committee consists of six members, with at least two places reserved for women, to ensure the Committee is representative of the broader worker membership. Half the Committee is re-elected each year. The Chair is termed a 'functional' chair – that is conducting the roles of a Chair, without having any decision-making powers on the Committee. In addition to the six members and the functional Chair, the Committee also has a Finance officer, Personnel officer and Operations Co-ordinator – all of whom hold advisory roles in a non-voting capacity on the Committee.

The Management Committee meets weekly, and has delegated decision-making powers that have been agreed internally, and which are not described in the governing document. The general meeting, involving all members meets six times during the year and agrees strategies, business plans and major policy decisions. The Management Committee is then given delegated decision-making to implement the plans and make recommendations to the general membership for future direction. Beyond the general meetings and meetings of the Management Committee, there are also Functional Area Co-ordinator meetings.

Functional Area Co-ordinators meet daily to discuss and agree issues in distinct operational areas of the organisation. Minutes are taken at these meetings and forwarded to the Management Committee, as part of the Operations Co-ordinators' report. These Functional Area Co-ordinator meetings ensure decisions are shared amongst as many worker members as possible, and provide another opportunity for decision-making involving worker members. The governance structure of the Co-operative enables the full worker membership to have control and ownership of decisions of the co-operative.



The Management Committee has delegated powers within agreed limits, although it must report back to the general membership over variations to the business plan, finances or personnel issues. The Co-operative states that the Management Committee is there to monitor progress, not to direct or enforce decisions.

Source: Co-operatives UK. *Suma Wholefoods*, case study no. 6. Manchester: Co-operatives UK, (n.d).

