

Non-Hierarchical Member Worker Collective (NON)-Management Model

prepared by Amber Sallaberry
June 2008

The Great Basin Community Food Co-op Board of Directors adopted Reno, NV's first non-hierarchical member-owner worker's collective on June 25, 2008. Why? Read on...

History of worker's collectives

The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC) was one of the first worker's collectives in the world to form and find success. MCC is a group of manufacturing and retail companies based in the Basque Country and extended over the rest of Spain and abroad. It is one of the world's largest worker cooperatives and one important example of workers' self-management*. The MCC is now the Basque Country's largest corporation, the seventh largest in Spain. The term *self-management was first used to describe the member-worker collective model of management...or should I say non-management. Worker self-management* (or autogestion) is a form of workplace decision-making in which the employees themselves agree on choices (for issues like customer care, general production methods, scheduling, division of labor etc.) instead of the traditional authoritative supervisor telling workers what to do, how to do it and where to do it. Worker collectives rose to prominence in the United States during the industrial revolution as part of the labor movement. As employment moved to industrial areas and job sectors declined, workers began organizing and controlling businesses for themselves. Worker collective cooperatives and worker cooperatives (two different models of cooperative structure, see below) were originally sparked by "critical reaction to industrial capitalism and the excesses of the industrial revolution."



Political Philosophy of worker collectives within cooperatives

The advocacy of workplace democracy, especially with the fullest expression of worker self-management, such as within member worker collective cooperatives, is rooted within several intellectual or political traditions: The alleviation of alienation in the workplace, especially in regard to Marxist thought, the encouragement of Participatory or Direct Democracy, radical but popular-democratic strategies for the overthrow of capitalism, for example, several strains of anarchist thought, autonomy and self control, especially

within anarchist thought. Member Workers collective cooperatives are also central to ideas of Autonomism, Mutualism, Syndicalism, Participatory economics, Guild socialism, and Libertarian socialism as well as others.

Meeting, Decision Making process and Sharing of Roles

If exercised directly, all members of the collective meet regularly to make - and vote on - decisions on how the co-operative is run. Direct worker collectives sometimes use consensus decision-making to make decisions. Direct worker control ensures a formally flat management structure instead of a hierarchical one. This structure is influenced by activist collectives and civic organizations, with all members of the collective allowed and expected to play a managerial role. Some worker collectives within cooperative businesses also practice job rotation or balanced job complexes to overcome inequalities of power as well as to give workers a wider range of experiences and exposure to the different jobs in a work place so that they are better able to make decisions about the whole workplace. The Mondragon Bookstore & Coffeehouse is a good example of a workplace that does this: <http://mondragon.ca/>

When the member-worker co-op operates as a collective and does not have managers, clear procedures for decision making are important. We need to clearly define what types of decisions can be made by individual workers, which can be made by work groups, and what kinds of issues should be addressed at bi-monthly meetings that include all members of the collective.

What are some of the other reasons that the GBCFC adopted a Non-Hierarchical Member-Owner Workers' Collectives?

Worker collectives within cooperatives build local assets and increase economic stability for worker-owners and their communities. Participatory decision making, featured in most worker collective coops, can enhance productivity, improve product and service quality, and promote the development of workers' skills.

In a member worker collectively run cooperative, workers partially own their jobs as they are one member entitled to one vote within the organization, and thus have not only a direct stake in the local environment but the power to decide to do business in a way that is sustainable for us all. The member worker collective cooperative movement is increasingly recognized as part of the larger movement for sustainability.

Member worker collective cooperatives tend to create long-term stable jobs, sustainable business practices, and linkages among different parts of the social economy. In addition to providing meaningful jobs and asset-building opportunities for workers of all income levels, member worker collective cooperatives can play an important role in building movements for economic justice and social change: as institutions where real democracy is practiced on a day to day basis, they are a model for the empowerment we will need to create the change we envision.

Social and Economic Justice within The Great Basin Community Food Cooperative

In order to promote economic justice and social change within our co-op, we will need to evaluate the cost of living in Washoe County so that we can begin to plan for and set goals of achieving "cost of living" salaries and benefits within The GBCFC collective.

Ideally, it would be fantastic to offer health and dental benefits to any member-worker of the cooperative that is full-time (30+ hours) or above.