CO-OP CAFE 2024

Power in Cooperatives:

Fruitful Conversations to Seed Transformation

Columinate

National COOP Grocers®

Land Acknowledgement

There are indigenous communities and cultures alive and well in North America and around the world, on ceded and unceded land. We encourage you to seek out connection and community in your area.

Resources:
[Land Acknowledgement | California Native American Legislative Caucus](#)
https://native-land.ca/
https://landback.org/manifesto/
https://resourcegeneration.org/land-reparations-indigenous-solidarity-action-guide/

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Introductions *(name, pronouns, co-op, role at co-op)*
3. Agenda Review
4. Affirm Community Agreements
5. How does power show up in our organizations?
   Conscious Power Exercise
6. How does accountability relate to our conversations about power?
   World Cafe
7. What can we do about it? / 15% Exercise
8. Closing
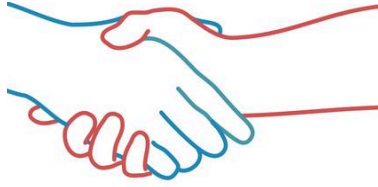
Community agreements

a way to help everyone in the group feel like they can contribute and be a part of courageous & brave conversations

- **Be Curious, Open, and Respectful** - call in, not out. We're trying to throw sunshine not shade
- **No one knows everything - together we know a lot**
- **Confidentiality** - don't speak for others without explicit permission, don't share something communicated in a private or safe space. Take the lesson, leave the story.
- **One mic** - one voice at a time
- **Take Space/Make Space** - if you are usually quiet challenge yourself to take more space, and if you usually talk a lot be mindful to leave room for quieter voices
- **Expect unfinished business**. There are always more conversations to have and more work to do.
- **Take space and time** to take care of yourself

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What is a good use of power?

Pair share harvest

- **Making change; making a difference**
- **Redistribution of power - if you have power, you can redistribute it**
  - **In meetings, and within hierarchy - making space for people to make them more visible**
- **Redistribution of resources**
- **Sharing power**
- **Who are the real stakeholders?**
- **Use power to guide things like product specification guidelines**
- **Being able to address and direct attention to people, individuals or needs that are outside the momentum of where an organization is normally going**

How Power Shows Up

Power-over
- Often how we traditionally think about power – the ability to get someone to do something against their will;
- Using rewards, punishments, manipulation to force someone to do something they do not choose.

Power-with-others
- The ability to influence and take action based on uniting with others;
- The power that comes from community, solidarity, cooperation.

Power-from-within
- The ability to influence and take action based on intention, clarity of vision, or charisma.
- Daw Aung San Suu Kyi explains: "If you have confidence in what you are doing and you are shored up by the belief that what you are doing is right, that in itself constitutes power, and this power is very important when you are trying to achieve something."

https://www.trainingforchange.org/training_tools/chair-power-three-types-of-power/

Conscious Power Exercise

The Cooperative Culture Handbook (page 114-117)

Exercise 16.1: 101 Ways to Get Power in a Group

There are obvious ways to get power. There are also subtle or nearly invisible ways. The reality that what is invisible to one person is often obvious to someone else adds complexity to power dynamics. Leaving aside, for the moment, questions of good and bad, this exercise works with a list of 101 ways to get power in a group. *(Note: this list is incomplete.)*

Instructions:

Step 1: Read through the list and note the **ways you get power in groups** (This can be done as a general exercise, or specifically related to one group you are a part of.)

Mark them with a [yellow] sticker

Step 2: Read through it a second time, thinking about the **ways that *others* get power that you find irritating, offensive, or problematic**.

Mark them with a [red] sticker

Step 3: Use the questions at the end for journaling and group discussion.

101 Ways to Get Power in a Group

1. Through election or appointment.
2. Being a founder of the group.
3. Being socially savvy in the group's culture.
4. Being articulate in the group's language.
5. Kindness and service to others in the group.
6. By reputation.
7. Being emotionally stable.
8. Being emotionally unstable.
9. Being willing to speak up.
10. Not caring about the impact your words and actions have on others.
11. Caring about the impact your words have on others.
12. Having good insight into human nature, or your particular group.
13. Working hard on group goals.
14. Knowing your strengths and finding a niche where you can use them.
15. Being well informed about a topic.
16. Not being well informed about a topic, and asking to be caught up.
17. Being friends with powerful people.
18. Being friends with rabble rousers.
19. Being willing to help others out.
20. Being socially engaged and connected to others.
21. Withdrawing emotionally when distressed.
22. Getting vulnerable when distressed.
23. Expressing emotional charge tied to specific requests.
24. Being charismatic.
25. Caretaking others.
26. Being mean or harsh when others are suffering.
27. Encouraging growth and honesty in others.
28. Being honest and trustworthy.
29. Having good judgment.
30. Not giving up when things get hard.
31. Giving up when things get hard.
32. Repeating yourself a lot.
33. Having healthy boundaries with others.
34. Having unhealthy boundaries with others.
35. Being physically or verbally intimidating.
36. Long term commitment to the group or its goals.
37. Having abundant energy.
38. Sharing your excitement and getting others excited.
39. Sounding like you know what you are talking about.
40. Genuinely knowing what you are talking about.
41. Being confused or going stupid.
42. Having lots of strong opinions.
43. Rarely having an opinion.
44. Being competent.

45. Being fun.
46. Nitpicking.
47. Being grounded.
48. Carrying yourself with authority.
49. Being attractive according to group standards.
50. Having resources you are willing to use to support group goals.
51. Having resources you are willing to withhold to get your way.
52. Saying anything that comes to mind without editing.
53. Carefully choosing your words.
54. Fitting a similar demographic profile to most people in the group.
55. Bring part of a noticeably different demographic profile from most people in the group.
56. Talking a lot in the group.
57. Needing to be drawn out in order to share your perspective.
58. Holding grudges that are publicly known.
59. Being flexible and able to let things go.
60. Hiding how you really feel about things.
61. Expressing how you really feel about things.
62. Not resolving conflicts.
63. Encouraging your friends to dislike the people you dislike.
64. Gossiping.
65. Being seductive.
66. Being mysterious.
67. Being gracious.
68. Being quick to judge.
69. Being a skilled bridger of different perspectives.
70. Playing people off each other.
71. Facilitating meetings.
72. Setting group agendas.
73. Having an unspoken agenda.
74. Controlling communications.
75. Writing communications.
76. Being a good listener.
77. Being a poor listener.
78. Being a teacher within the group.
79. Withholding what you know, especially if paired with judging the outcome harshly.
80. Being easy to get along with.
81. Being difficult to get along with.
82. Being sensitive to group energy.
83. Being insensitive to group energy.
84. Having your speed of thought and action match the group's culture.
85. Not having your speed of thought and action match the group's culture.
86. Exhibiting patience.
87. Exhibiting impatience.
88. Following group protocol before acting.
89. Not following group protocol before acting.
90. Asking for what you need or want.
91. Not asking for what you need or want and blaming others when those needs aren't met.

92. Threatening to leave the group.
93. Digging heels in about staying in the group past the point of helpfulness.
94. Being willing to do a wide range of work to benefit the group.
95. Not being willing to do a wide range of work to benefit the group.
96. Being late.
97. Consistently being on time.
98. Not showing up for commitments.
99. Consistently showing up for commitments.
100. Telling people what they want to hear.
101. Speaking for other people, especially when it means now owning your own feelings.

Questions for Self Reflection: (write, doodle, think)

1. What sticks out to you?
2. What surprised you?
3. Are there ways people get power that you hadn't considered, or hadn't been conscious of?
4. How might it be helpful to bring attention to some of these power dynamics in groups we're working with?
5. Is there anything you might do differently as a result of this activity?
6. (ex - language - using the full name, and not the acronym - makes people feel like they don't belong if they don't know what it means.)

Pair Share: (pair up with someone you don't already know)

Take one (or more if you have time) of the icky things and have a conversation and see how we can support each other in finding healthy ways to address the problematic ones.

Questions for contemplation or discussion: (from the book)

1. Can you think of other ways to get power in a group?
2. Is there any overlap between what you do and what bothers you when other people do it?
3. Do you think your answers are different in different contexts? Do you have a sense of what those differences are about?

4. Are there healthy ways you can think of to address the ones you find most problematic?
5. How and on whose behalf do I use the power I have?
6. How is power used in our group to get things done?
7. How is power used in our group to prevent things from happening?

Some additional notes for facilitators of group discussions on this topic:

As you hold the container for this conversation, it's useful to track and draw attention to some common patterns. Often increasing perception is a solution in itself. Below are some patterns we often see and would encourage you to highlight as they arrive in your conversations.

1. There are really two core questions about power in a group: How do you get your power? And how (and on whose behalf) do you use your power? Any thorough conversation about power needs to include both of these pieces, because there can be abuse on both fronts and there can also be responsible expression on both fronts.
2. It is also important to unpack it if someone feels like they are using their power well and others don't. It's often this gap between self-perception and what others perceive that gets us into trouble.
3. Behaviors that draw people to you tend to amass power; however, behaviors that cause people to want to avoid you can also increase your power. Why? Because people often alter their behavior (including speech patterns, what they are willing to talk to a person about, and whole proposals) based on not wanting to deal with someone. Being anti-social and difficult are potent ways to wield power. Someone who presents as socially difficult can actually be wielding considerable power within a group, and indeed for some people, *it's the only way they have a voice.*
4. Covert or "sideways" power expressions are often indicators that folks aren't able to find more direct ways of having influence by following the (usually unspoken) rules. While sometimes this is a matter of someone's personality (the "contrarian" or "rebel" embraced as an identity) it can also be a sign that the group is only functioning well for people who play by the rules or who are existing in a

privileged state where their easy ways of interacting closely match with the culture of the group.

5. Power is not only the ability to get things done, but it is also the ability to prevent things from getting done. Power dynamics involving someone who prevents group movement are often a lot harder to talk about than the ones involving people who are more overtly using power.

Conscious Power Exercise

Questions for Self Reflection: (write, doodle, think)

- Why are some things acceptable, and some unacceptable ways of accessing power?
- Where do those feelings or assumptions come from? Consider societal pressures and "isms" that might be at play.
- What sticks out to you?
- What surprised you?
- Are there ways people get power that you hadn't considered, or hadn't been conscious of?
- How might it be helpful to bring attention to some of these power dynamics in groups we're working with?
- Is there anything you might do differently as a result of this activity?
  - (ex - language - using the full name, and not the acronym - makes people feel like they don't belong if they don't know what it means.)

Ways to Get Power in a Group

1. Through election or appointment or being hired.
2. Facilitating meetings.
3. Being willing to speak up.
4. Not caring about the impact your words and actions have on others.
5. Caring / Awareness about the impact your words have on others.
6. Working hard on group goals.
7. Knowing your strengths and finding a niche where you can use them.
8. Not being well informed about a topic, and asking to be caught up.
9. Being friends with powerful people.
10. Being willing to help others out.
11. Being charismatic.
12. Asking for what you need or want.
13. Not asking for what you need or want and blaming others when those needs aren't met.
14. Being mean or harsh when others are suffering.
15. Encouraging growth and honesty in others.
16. Having good judgment / making good decisions.
17. Sharing your excitement and getting others excited.
18. Sounding like you know what you are talking about.
19. Genuinely knowing what you are talking about.
20. Having lots of strong opinions.
21. Rarely having an opinion.
22. Nitpicking.
23. Not resolving conflicts.
24. Carrying yourself with authority.
25. Fitting a similar demographic profile to most people in the group.
26. Being part of a noticeably different demographic profile from most people in the group.
27. Talking a lot in the group.
28. Holding grudges that are publicly known.

NOTES - Conscious Power Exercise

- Getting away from assuming that others know what acronyms and jargon mean
- Think about ways of explaining things so that everyone (with different background information) can understand
- Try to make the invisible more visible - notice and point out when these dynamics are being used
- This is tough stuff!!!
- What is your point of view - where do you sit (board member, staff, etc) - depending on where you sit, you might have different outlooks on the ways power are used
- Power is not inherently a problem
- Better to notice what we're doing and claim it, be explicit, so it loses

some of its unnamed power
- **If we take away some of the mystery of the ways people are amassing power, we can be more aware of it, and have a more critical eye (where appropriate)**
- **The idea of "getting" power is interesting - most of us aren't trying to power-hoard, or "get" power. That's not why we join a board, for example**
- **Power can be an opportunity to be great leaders**
- **What would it be like if no one led? We might not have co-ops.**
- **We need to manage it.**
- **There tends to be tension around power**
- **What is our place within the scheme of things?**
- **Where we are can change in the power structure**
    - **How we see ourselves**
    - **How others see us**
- **GM job is more of a responsibility than a cry for power**
    - **If everyone is not on board, we're not going anywhere.**
- **Different emotional reactions to power and what it means to be powerful**
- **Time to rethink the power question**
    - **Not long ago, things like gender and race were not at the center of this conversation**
    - **Living in good times for the rethinking of power**
- **The glue of the status quo is systemic power, not interpersonal**

Power and Accountability

"With great power comes great responsibility."

- proverb popularized by Spider Man in Marvel media
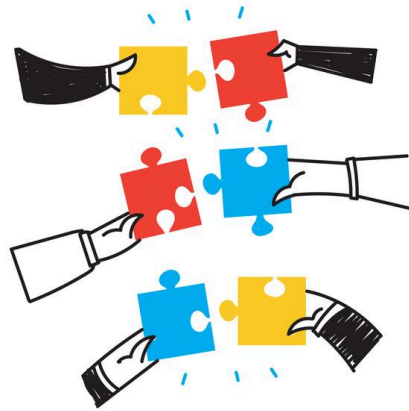
Accountability World Cafe

- How do we share power in our co-ops? And how does accountability connect with that?

- How are all of us accountable to members - both current and future members of the co-op?

NOTES – Accountability

What does accountability mean to you?

- We can think about it as A process, not a particular point in time , as continuous learning, seeking feedback and making adjustments
- Being on the hook - if it doesn't go well, people will come to me
- Integrity
- Following through
- Responsibility to hold people accountable for their actions but it's hard to follow up on that! E.g. coming to work late or leaving early – how do we help people understand the importance of this
- Empowers the act of ethical decisions; gets the best interest of everybody and holds transparency and the justification for decision making
- No accountability = could be an abuse of power. Keeps power in check.
- Has to be fair for all! Consistency in expectations
- Responsibilities we have to get things to work

How do we share power in our co-ops?

And how does accountability connect with that?

- With sharing power, making things explicit - who has power / authority to make decisions
- Knowing the boundaries (having that list of who is doing what)
- Shared accountability of people, planet, profit - the tension of that
- Delegation of authority document that the board negotiated with the GM - clearly says what the boundaries are

How are all of us accountable to members -
both current and future members of the co-op?

- Thinking about the financial resilience of the business and sustainability - protect that, and members' equity to make sure we can invest in the co-op in the future (the literal building)
  - Keeping it strong, robust, financially secure

15% Solutions

1. **Individual reflection**

   Generate a list of things you can do now,

   without additional resources or authority**.**

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NOTES – 15% Solutions

- Unresolved conflicts as a way of getting power – I might be culpable of that sometimes! I will think about how that affects my board work.
- Be cognizant of people perceiving me as powerful as a board member even when I am not thinking or acting like that. Finding ways I can contribute appropriately without doing everything!
- Start participating in meetings more! I can start joining in conversations and not discount my opinion because I am new
- Ensure that I am passing on information I hold so everyone can share that knowledge and it is available for others for the future.
- Find my lane! What is my responsibility as a board member?
- Foster workplace culture and engagement, keeping everyone moving forward. My 15% is going to be focusing more on strategic visioning and decisionmaking process.
- Building strong relationships contributes to a stronger movement!
- Understanding how people show up in meetings as a way of understanding power.
- **Bring up all members in conversations**

💡 Resources

Cooperative Culture Handbook

by Yana Ludwig and Karen Gimnig

The Cooperative Culture Handbook has 52 transformative group and individual exercises. It's a practical toolkit for groups to solve problems, build community, and change culture towards greater empathy and authenticity. This is an essential resource for leaders, facilitators and changemakers to develop core practices in discernment, curiosity, communication and engagement.

15% Exercise - https://www.liberatingstructures.com/7-15-solutions/

Thanks for joining us today! Feel free to reach out:

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BIG thanks to NCG for sponsoring the Co-op Cafes!

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

Not a point of arrival, but a process.

Being responsible for one's choices & their consequences.

SELF-REFLECTION

Recognize Harm

Work through shame

Be curious & listen

Sit with uncomfortable feelings

Peel apart the layers of HOW & WHY you commited harm & acted outside your values

What need were you meeting by causing harm?

BEING IN RELATIONSHIP

Apologize & make amends • Take responsibility for impacts • Make shifts to stop harm

SHAME · RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

ISOLATION · "YOU MATTER"

Choosing to be in relationship while also acknowledging harm

Repair = a new way of being

Accountability is respecting each others' humanity & dignity and recognizing that we all have the capacity to harm.

COMMUNITY

Make accountability the norm

Achievable, Realistic, & Irresistible

Meeting Needs

Building new communities

Changing conditions
supremacy & otherness → empathy & care

Accountability counts even when the person who caused harm doesn't participate

To revisit on the regular:
· a shared idea of accountability & community
· ways to remind each other that we are a community & we are accountable to each other

Ft. Mia Mingus, Priya Rai, RJ Maccani, Esteban Kelly, Sonya Shah, Shira Hassan, Elliott Fukui, adrienne marie brown, Stas Schmiedt, Lea Roth, kai lumumba barrow, Martina Kartman, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, nuri nusrat, & Mimi Kim

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