

from conflict to co-operation

a handy illustrated guide for community enterprises



5

**Role and responsibilities
of the committee**

Foreword

In order to achieve their goals and be sustainable, community enterprises need to know how to work as a team – communicating effectively, making good decisions, dealing with the inevitable conflicts and coping with growth and change. **‘from conflict to co-operation’** – a series of handy illustrated guides – is invaluable. It includes useful hints and tips as well as signposting to further resources.

The accessible and entertaining content is based on co-operative working concepts and has been written with community enterprises in mind, but it will be useful for any group trying to work together to achieve common goals.

The author, Kate Whittle, has over twenty-five years experience working in and with co-operatives and community enterprises of all kinds, both in the UK and overseas. Angela Martin, the illustrator, is a well-known cartoonist – with experience of illustrating a range of communication and group dynamics guides and handbooks.

I’m sure you will find these booklets a useful and fun resource – enjoy reading them, put their recommendations into practice and harvest the fruits of good teamwork!

Gillian Bober,
President of the East of England Co-operative Society

Introduction

This is the last Booklet in the series '**from conflict to co-operation**'. The series aims to help community enterprises not only deal with conflict when it arises (Booklet 1), but also avoid unnecessary conflict by:

- improving communication (Booklet 2)
- improving meetings and decision-making (Booklet 3)
- managing change caused by organisational growth and development (Booklet 4)
- clarifying the role of the committee (Booklet 5)

The governing body of a community enterprise can take different forms and names, depending on its legal structure. It may be called the Board



of Directors, Management committee, or simply the committee. Whatever it is called this body has overall responsibility for the success of the community enterprise, and all its members are equally responsible. For the sake of simplicity we have used the term 'committee' to refer to the governing body in all the Booklets in the series.

The aim of this Booklet is to describe ways in which misunderstandings or unchecked assumptions about the role and responsibilities of the committee can result in organisational conflict.

We suggest how to prevent or minimise such conflicts through clarifying the role of the committee, identifying key responsibilities and understanding how the committee functions. We make recommendations, including an annual cycle of meetings, recruitment and induction of new committee members, improving committee performance and delegation of tasks to sub-groups or working parties. Finally, we propose that if you can avoid cliques and develop an atmosphere of openness and trust, in which you can be open about difficulties and in which critical debate is possible, you will find it easier to avoid conflicts arising from misunderstandings about the role of the committee.

Part 1 **The role of the committee**

The committee is a group of people who are elected by those involved in the community enterprise from amongst their number, to carry out strategic management. This means they are responsible for the long-term direction and guidance of the enterprise.

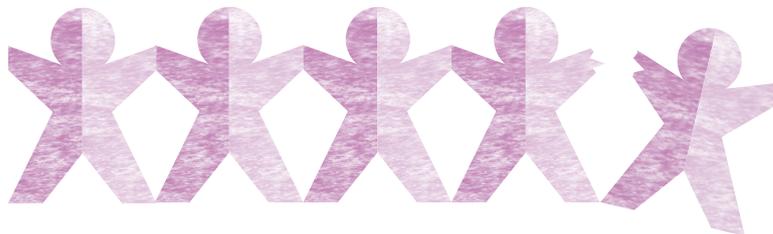
Committee members have a legal duty to act in good faith in the pursuit of the best interests of the community enterprise, and their role is to direct and not manage the community enterprise. The committee has a responsibility to ensure there is a business plan, and approve it, but it is the role of employees and/or volunteers to implement it.

In directing the enterprise, the committee needs appropriate skills and knowledge as it is the committee members' responsibility to scrutinise performance and hold employees and volunteers to account.

It is also the responsibility of the committee to ensure that employees and volunteers have appropriate skills and attitudes to manage human and financial resources in accordance with agreed policies and procedures.

**We must learn to live together
as brothers or perish
together as fools**

Martin Luther King, Jr.





1.1 Different assumptions about the role of the committee

There are three areas where misunderstanding or different assumptions about the role of the committee can lead to conflict:

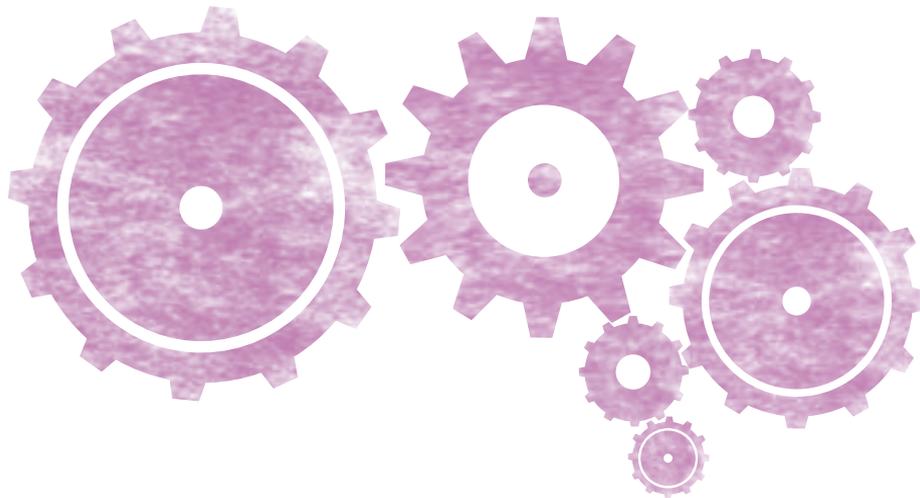
i) lack of understanding about who governs – 'experts' or 'representatives'

People may make different assumptions about why they have been elected to the committee (for example, I might believe I have been elected for my specialist expertise,

while you may assume you have been elected to represent the views of your team). If those assumptions are not shared, they can lead to very different views when it comes to decision-making.

ii) different assumptions about whether the committee should be entrepreneurial or risk averse.

There can be a range of assumptions about the attitude of committee members to risk, which will vary according to the sector or development phase of the organisation. Does the committee wish to act in an entrepreneurial fashion, taking risks in a bid to develop new services

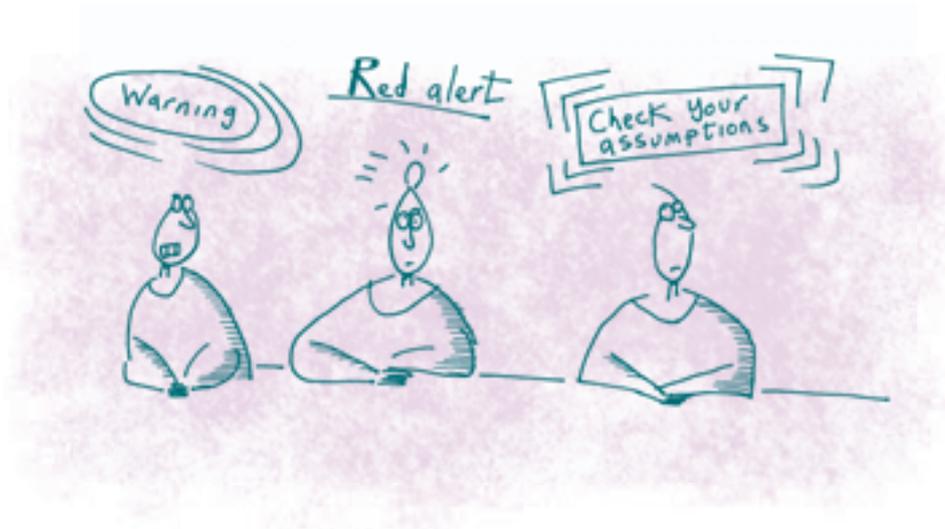


or new markets? Or should it be more conservative, stewarding the organisation's assets for the future?

Again, it's the unchecked assumptions that will cause conflict. For example, if I believe my role is to work with management, developing new markets or taking risks with the organisation's assets in order to generate greater income, and others assume that the role is to conserve assets for the future, not taking any risks, then we are going to be constantly at loggerheads and committee meetings will be hard work! It's not about right or wrong – it's about clear communication!

**Synergy - the bonus that
is achieved when things work
together harmoniously**

Mark Twain



iii) lack of clear boundaries between the overall direction of the enterprise and day-to-day management or operations.

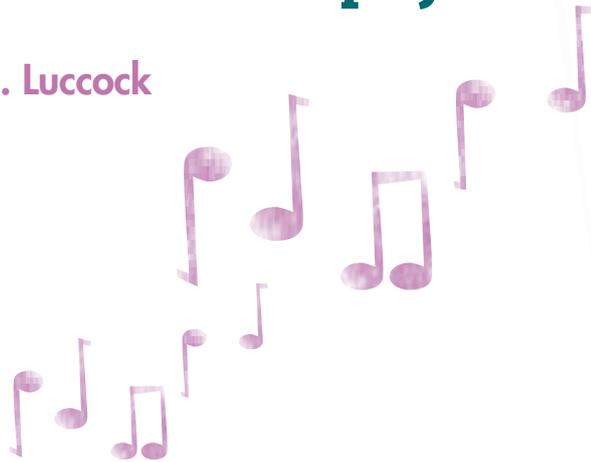
Such conflict can be the result of the committee overlapping into day-to-day management, so that employees or volunteers feel they are constantly being interfered with, instead of being allowed to get on with the work. On the other hand, if the committee is too relaxed about its responsibilities, so that employees or volunteers are obliged

to deal with matters which are really the responsibility of the committee, again, there will be problems.

There can also be misunderstanding about whether the committee is there to supervise employees or volunteers or to provide them with support. Again, there's no right or wrong here, you're looking for a relationship that works, but it's helpful if everyone is aware how it works.

No one can whistle a symphony. It takes an orchestra to play it

H.E. Luccock



What about when committee members and workers are the same people?

Boundaries are still the issue here – what makes it slightly trickier is that the boundaries are in people's heads. In a community enterprise where those involved have more than one role, it is easy to confuse them, for example by assuming that committee decisions can be taken in the workplace, or undermining the workplace authority of a colleague because you are both members of the committee.

Of course there will always be overlap, and you don't want to be too inflexible, but it helps if you can keep issues of the direction of the enterprise separate from day to day operational issues, either by having a separate meeting – or separate parts of the same meeting.

It also helps to remember that you are only a committee member in the *committee meeting*. On the shop floor, or in the garden, farm or warehouse, you are an employee or a volunteer, with the same rights and responsibilities as your fellows.

Part 2 Committee responsibilities

The committee has legal responsibility for governing the organisation. It is responsible internally for the overall direction and supervision of the community enterprise. Externally it is responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations and for accountability to funders, other stakeholders and the wider community.

2.1 Officers

It is good practice to elect a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer as Officers of the committee. Legal requirements will be different according to your legal framework. Co-operatives UK's Simply Governance will give you further information on legal requirements for committee Officers – see Signposting page.

The Secretary (Company Secretary if your community enterprise is registered as a Company)

The Secretary is responsible for the efficient administration of the organisation, particularly with regard to ensuring compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements

and for ensuring that committee decisions are implemented. The Secretary's responsibilities include:

- calling the AGM, including ensuring that proper and timely notice is given, and that business is transacted according to the constitution
- calling other general meetings
- taking Minutes and keeping a record of Minutes (could be delegated)
- submitting required documents to Companies House or the FSA

Co-operatives UK's Simply Legal will give you further information on the Secretary's role – See Signposting page.

The Treasurer

The Treasurer deals with all aspects of finance and funding, although some aspects of the work may be delegated to a book-keeper or finance sub-committee. The Treasurer will have a general financial oversight, advising the committee on all aspects of finance

The Treasurer's responsibilities include:

- income: sales, contracts and fundraising
- financial planning and budgeting
- banking, book-keeping, and record-keeping
- control of fixed assets and stock

Co-operatives UK's Simply Legal will give you further information on the Treasurer's role – See Signposting page.

The Chair

The Chair is an important role, providing leadership to the committee for the overall governance and strategic direction of the community enterprise. The Chair may also be the external face of the community enterprise, liaising with partner organisations and stakeholders. The Chair may also have the function of Chairing meetings, covered in detail in Booklet Three.



Part 3 Team working

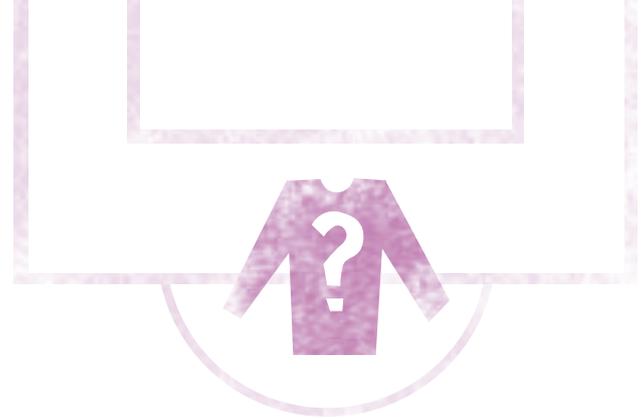
The relationship between employees, volunteers and the committee can be complex and interdependent, there is no one “right way” of doing things. But to avoid conflict, you need to review roles and relationships regularly – things change!

Collective accountability and confidentiality

It is important that committee members understand that decisions taken are collective decisions and must be respected, even if the individual spoke out against them. committee decision-making should be open and transparent, so that everyone involved in the community enterprise is informed about the work of the committee. However, committee discussions are confidential and should not be disclosed to people outside the committee.

A team has been defined as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”

However, if you think of a football team, or an orchestra, it’s clear that team members have different roles, and that they seek to achieve their common purpose by performing these roles to the best of their ability. We would add that an



**Wearing the SAME shirts
doesn't make you a team**

Buchholz and Roth



effective team is based on mutual respect and trust, and utilises the collective skills of the team in productive meetings. The team respects individual differences in experience, skills and personalities, regularly reviews its performance and gives high priority to individual development.

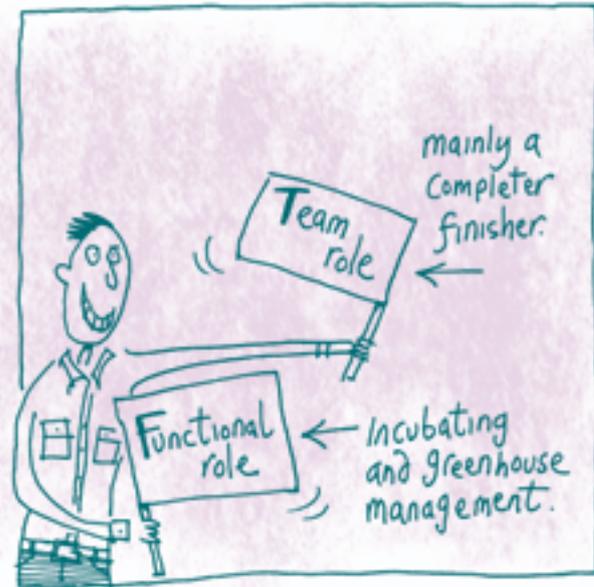
Task and Process

A common cause of conflict in a team is the misunderstandings that can occur when some people are focusing so much on the task in hand – maybe because of a tight deadline or lack of funds – that they forget to pay attention to how well the group is working together and whether everybody is participating as much as they are able.

Under such circumstances, there may be useful skills or experience in the team that we don't know about because we forgot to ask, or people maybe aren't contributing their best because they are being ignored.

It's important for the team to acknowledge the need to pay attention to the process as well as the task, and that means being aware when someone is not participating and ensuring they can if they want to; practising listening skills, maybe telling a joke to reduce tension, promote open discussion of conflict and expressing support, acceptance, liking and praise for other team members.

Research has identified several typical 'team roles' that committee members can play – and it helps if you have all the bases covered. If you are great at dreaming up ideas, it helps if you have a colleague on board who likes to make sure that ideas are practical and can be implemented.



A decorative arrangement of pink stars of various sizes, scattered across the page. Some are larger and more prominent, while others are smaller and more numerous, creating a sense of movement and energy.

Do you want a **collection** of brilliant minds or a **brilliant** **collection of minds?**

Henrik Ibsen

What's your team role?

Dr. Meredith Belbin, of the Industrial Training Research Unit at Cambridge, recognised that members of a team are playing two roles. The first role, or functional one, is obvious: team members are present because of their work function: an accountant or shop co-ordinator or personnel manager.

The second role, what Dr. Belbin calls the team role, is less obvious, but we recognise it as the familiar behaviour of our colleagues – Imran is always coming up with new ideas, Mary is keen to ensure that annual reports and accounts are ready on time and Franny is a good listener, and always sees both sides of an argument. Dr Belbin's research and theory proposes that these characteristic behaviour sets (or team roles) crop up again and again, and that an effective team will have a number of different team roles to balance each other. Belbin says that people will typically express more than one of these team roles, and that under different situations, in different teams, individuals can play different roles. He invented a questionnaire to enable people to identify which role(s) they feel most comfortable in. The questionnaire can be downloaded for a small fee from his website. (See Signposting page.)

The Belbin roles

Plant

Creative, imaginative, unorthodox, solves difficult problems, BUT ignores incidentals, too preoccupied to communicate effectively

Resource investigator

Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative, explores opportunities, develops contacts, BUT over-optimistic, loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed

Co-ordinator

Mature, confident, a good Chair; clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well, BUT can be manipulative, offloads personal work

Shaper

Challenging, dynamic, galvanises team into action, thrives on pressure, drive and courage to overcome obstacles, BUT prone to provocation, can offend people's feelings

Monitor/evaluator

Critical thinker and analyst, sound judgement, practical and objective, BUT can lack drive and ability to inspire others

Teamworker

Concerned for process and team spirit, perceptive and diplomatic, listens, builds agreement, averts friction, BUT may be indecisive

Implementer

Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient; turns ideas into practical actions, BUT can be inflexible, slow to respond to new possibilities

Completer/finisher

Painstaking, conscientious, searches out errors and omissions, delivers on time, BUT inclined to worry unduly, reluctant to delegate

Specialist

Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated, provides knowledge and skills, BUT contributes on only a narrow front, dwells on technicalities

Induction

New committee members need to understand the role of the committee and their own role within it, so they need to be familiar with documents such as the Mission statement, aims and objectives, business plan and policies and procedures. If they are not already familiar with these documents, they need to receive a copy or information on where the documents can be located. However, as with all inductions, don't just give them a pile of paper to read. At the very least they should have a meeting (ideally prior to their first committee meeting) with the Chair or Secretary to go through key documents and answer any questions. A mentor or buddy on the committee for the first few months would also be a good idea.

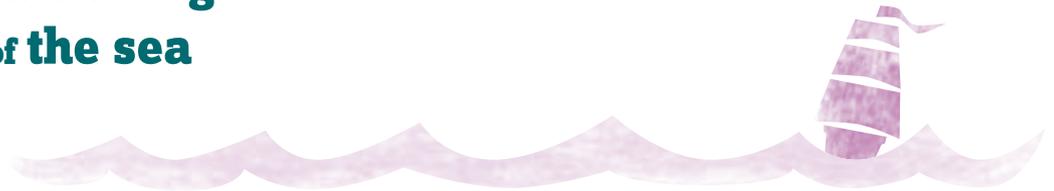
**If you want to build a ship,
don't drum up people together to collect
wood and don't assign them tasks and
work, but rather teach them to long for
the endless immensity of the sea**

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Committee training

Training is costly, not just in financial terms but also in terms of the lost hours that would have been spent generating income for the community enterprise. However, as long as you are clear about your training needs and your goals for the session, it should be considered an investment, since if it is effective it will bring rewards in terms of a smarter and more efficient committee, working fewer hours, making more informed decisions and avoiding the waste of time and resources involved in ill-managed and unnecessary conflict.

If it is difficult to justify the time/costs of a whole day, perhaps two half-days would be more manageable. Such an arrangement allows time for the concepts and ideas explored during the first session to be assimilated before the second session. If you are bringing in an outside facilitator, make sure the person you choose has the right experience and skills. Co-operatives UK, the Plunkett Foundation or your local Co-operative Development Body should be able to help. See the Signposting page for links.



Ten tips for a flourishing committee

1. A good starting place is to look at the overall responsibilities of your committee. What skills, knowledge and experience are essential and desirable?

- Carry out a committee skills audit, asking committee members to give details of their experience, skills and qualifications, and then identify the gaps - what's missing?

- The next step is to discuss how you will plug the gaps - could you send someone on a training course?

Maybe you need to organise training for the whole committee?

Or co-opt people or recruit new committee members? (Co-opt

means to invite people to attend meetings to advise the committee.

Co-opted members do not normally have a vote). Or perhaps the gap can be filled by purchasing new computer software, such as an accounting package.

2. Clarify key responsibilities:

- where is the line between committee and day-to-day operational responsibilities (don't be too rigid, it will change over time)

- who can take which decisions?

3. Think about establishing sub-committees or time limited working parties to deal with specific issues and report back to the committee.

4. Develop a committee member's brief and use it for recruiting new committee members. The committee member's brief could include a description of the role of the committee, including the type of decisions it takes and those which are the province of management or staff, an outline of the responsibilities of the post, a timetable of meetings through the year and arrangements for payment of expenses.

5. Check your Constitution to see if it limits the length of time people can

be members of the committee. If not you could amend it, or adopt a policy covering elections to the committee. For example you could choose to have a third of the members stand for re-election every year, so you bring in fresh blood without losing continuity.

6. Draw up annual cycle of monthly or quarterly committee meetings including at least one strategic planning meeting with all stakeholders.

7. Carry out regular reviews of committee performance and use the review to decide on issues which could be addressed through a training programme.

8. Organise a committee training programme.

9. Hold committee away-days and informal get-togethers.

10. Try to build a culture in which critical debate is possible!

Summary

Booklet Five described ways in which misunderstandings or unchecked assumptions about the role and responsibilities of the committee can result in organisational conflict.

- We suggested how to prevent or minimise such conflicts through clarifying the role of the committee, identifying key responsibilities and understanding how the committee functions.
- We made recommendations, including delegation of tasks, an annual cycle of meetings, recruitment and induction of new committee members and improving committee performance.
- We looked at the importance of team working and described some team building tips and techniques.
- Finally we proposed that if you can avoid cliques and develop an atmosphere of openness and trust, in which you can be open about difficulties and in which critical debate is possible, you will find it easier to manage conflicts arising from misunderstandings about the role of the committee.

We hope 'from conflict to co-operation' will be a useful and entertaining guide to coping with as well as avoiding conflict in your community enterprise. We certainly enjoyed writing and drawing it! **Enjoy!**



Signposting

Books & papers

- Sandy Adirondack *Just about managing*
London Voluntary Service Council
- Cornforth, C. (ed) *The Governance of Public and Non-profit Organizations: What Do Boards Do?*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp259. (Republished in paperback in April 2005)
- Cornforth, C.J. (2004) 'The governance of co-operatives and mutual associations: a paradox perspective', *Annals of Public and Co-operative Economics*, vol. 75, no. 1, pp11-32.



Websites

To download a pdf copy of the booklet, go to www.fromconflict2co-operation.uk.coop

- Corporate Governance Code of Best Practice
www.uk.coop
- Simply Legal
www.uk.coop
- Simply Governance
www.uk.coop

- A-Z of Good Governance
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
- Team working & team building
www.cooperantics.co.uk
www.innovativeteambuilding.co.uk
- Belbin team roles
www.belbin.com
- The Plunkett Foundation
www.plunkett.co.uk
- List of Co-operative Development Bodies
www.uk.coop



www.uk.coop



Making Local Food Work (MLFW) is a Big Lottery funded partnership of seven organisations: Co-operatives UK, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Country Markets, FARMA, The Plunkett Foundation, Sustain and the Soil Association. MLFW is rooted in the belief that the needs of consumers, producers and the land are interdependent, and that community enterprise can renew and strengthen these links to the lasting benefit of all.

Community enterprises can be organised in a variety of ways – from an informal group getting together to purchase food in bulk, to a professional trading organisation – but they all involve people working together to achieve a common goal. Examples include farmers’ markets, community owned pubs and shops, community energy projects and car pools. The way in which activities are organised and decisions made is called governance, and the group of people who come together to organise activity and make longer term decisions is called the Governing Body – or Management committee or Board of Directors – according to the type of organisation.



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Co-operatives UK is the national trade body that campaigns for co-operation and works to promote, develop and unite co-operative enterprises. Co-operatives UK aims to bring together all those with a passion and interest in co-operative action.