

The word "cooperative" in general use tends to be very vague without a context. The use of the word "community" is also similarly vague without a context of application or expectations of certain results. Within a conventional corporation or in relation to law enforcement the word "cooperative" more or less means doing what you are told to do without questioning the reasons or effects. This expectation is quite opposite of the active cooperation of an informed citizen or cooperative member.

The major difference between Robert Owen who secularized the idea of utopian communities and the Owenites who established the early cooperatives in England was that Owen operated on a principle of paternalism, while the cooperators were strong advocates of democracy.

The following principles are drawn from the practices of the Rochdale Pioneers Cooperative in Rochdale, England. The Rochdale Pioneers cooperative was the first effort to establish this kind of mutual aid society which also became successful.

These principles were not directly developed by the Rochdale Pioneers, because they had a more immediate, goal oriented interest in the results and the performance of the organization than in developing a formula of principles. They were also not interested in personal loyalties or in commanding politically based authority. Their emphasis was clearly upon the actual performance of the organization and operation.

The opposite approach would be to make vague references and associations to the philosophy of or to the positive legacy of cooperatives, and then ignoring the actual practices and outcomes.

In 1837 the Rochdale Pioneers very simply saw themselves as actual pioneers and explorers in a new territory of political economy and moral philosophy. They had a sense of what they wanted to accomplish and then worked out what practices seemed to produce the desired results. It very clearly was not a process of "cooperation" by demand, coercion, or subordination.

The original cooperative movement grew out of the English union movement of the early 19th century. This movement was necessary to redress the abuses by chartered corporations, "free market" mercantilists, and their political allies in the British Parliament. Any application of the word "cooperative" that does not abide by the following principles of practice, should be described by as a more general use of the adjective "cooperative." This sort of divergence also thereby departs from the pioneering legacy to establish a new order of society.

This following text is drawn directly from a statement by the International Cooperative Alliance. This is easily confirmed with a small amount of initiative.

Definition:

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural

needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. Member participate in setting their policies and making decisions.

Values:

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.

Principles:

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their Members who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member one vote), and cooperatives at other

levels are also organized in a democratic manner

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information:

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the

development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6th Principle: Co-operation Among Co-operatives:

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.

7th Principle: Concern for Community Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

This Statement on the Co-operative Identity was adopted at the 1995 Congress and General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance, held in Manchester, England

The Rochdale Principles as derived from the Performance and Success of the Rochdale Pioneers Cooperative

Re-Imagining Economics