

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Cooperative Networks as a Source of Organizational Innovation- Two Canadian Case Studies: Education and Health Care Co-ops

Innovative Cooperative Solutions Workshop

ICA Research Conference, Mikkeli, Finland

13:30-18:00 Thursday, August 25, 2011

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FOCUS

This workshop will be geared to a general audience, and will bring to life two case studies of innovative Canadian cooperatives: CMEC (Cooperative Management Education Co-operative) and HealthConnex, a health care cooperative. The attached background paper to this workshop, **Cooperative networks as a source of organizational innovation** (Novkovic and Holm, 2011) presents the case studies grounded in the theoretical framework of networks, complex adaptive systems and cooperative advantage.

CONTEXT

In this age of globalism — where rivers of capital move silently through borderless economies, sourcing at the lowest cost and charging back to society its costly externalities – we are adrift on a raft of our own making. Firms today excel at what neo-classical economists and governments have been cheering them on to do since the mid 30's: make investors richer and the economy will be better for it.

But somewhere along the way, communities got left behind. Economic bullies have captured the flag. The question now is: how do communities take it back?

As the theory and examples presented in this paper suggest, stakeholders, unfettered by hierarchical systems and supported by a cooperative infrastructure, seem to have a natural instinct to cooperate. This fosters relationships that, in the presence of common purpose, create networks. As Novkovic suggests, when networks are complex — bringing together differing perspectives and resources — and when systems are democratic and open-ended, the potential exists for unplanned adaptation, innovation and entrepreneurship. This is particularly true when led by cooperative champions who present a vision of a public good that elicits strong buy-in.

Under these unique circumstances, innovation blooms like wildflowers in a meadow - with unexpected bursts of colour and in unanticipated places. And, like the wings of a butterfly, many small actions have resonance on a much wider scale, creating the co-operative framework for an adaptive, community-focused process that – properly harnessed – can deliver the dignity and security of a sustainable future.

Complex Organizational Theory

Relationship based
Open systems (interact w environ)
Open Membership
Democratic
Non-Linear
Context and path dependency
Decentralized, Self-Organizing

Complex Adaptive Systems Characteristics

Diversity
Interconnected independent agents
Adaptive capacity
Ability to learn
Decentralized decision-making
Relationships more imp't than individs
Non-linear, path dependent

COMPLEX ADAPTIVE NETWORKS

CO-OP
CHAMPIONS

CO-OP
CHAMPIONS

COMPLEX NETWORKS

For common purpose,
often outside core area
often multi-stakeholder
with diverse org. forms

TYPES OF CO-OPERATIVE NETWORKS

SECTORAL or REGIONAL

For professional or co-op development (member services)

INDIVIDUAL CO-OP

Network of individual co-op members e.g. farmers, artisans, consumers

SUPPLY-CHAIN

Co-op Networks that form links in a supply chain (e.g. fair trade coffee)

PURPOSE DRIVEN

Co-op networks for specific purpose (2nd tier co-ops & federations)