



Worker Co-op Structures and Decision-Making Processes

There are as many structures and decision-making processes for worker co-ops as there are worker co-ops, but in this guide, we pull some common themes and strategies together. If you are in early stages of co-op development, remember to find systems that work for you now and, as much as possible, ones that will last as you grow. [Here is a clickable visual prezi on this topic.](#)

Governance Structures

How are major decisions, policies, and strategies set for your cooperative? How much hierarchy is right for your co-op's culture, size (current and future) and effectiveness?

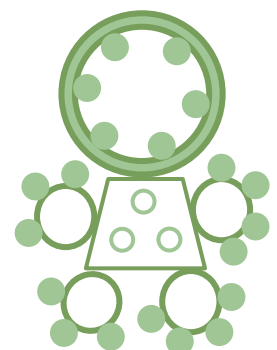
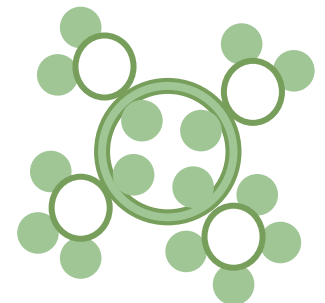
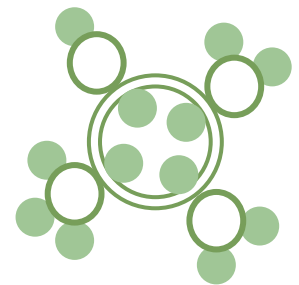
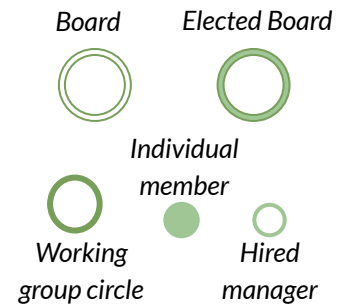
Collectives are where all members have equal governance power. This structure is usually found in small co-ops that aim for very little hierarchy. If your legal statute requires you to have a board, most often all members are automatically members of the board.

Common decision-making process in collectives: *modified consensus, pure consensus, or majority vote.*

Co-ops that use **Sociocracy or Holacracy** have structures that focus on empowered circles or committees. They can include a representative governance circle that functions much like a board. [Much more about this governance, management and decision-making approach here.](#) Sociocracy uses a form of modified consensus decision-making that is consent-based.

Co-ops that have an **elected board** empower this governing body to differing degrees. Some co-op boards maintain significant shared governance with members often including monthly, quarterly or very active annual member meetings. Boards are often empowered to create policies, lead strategic planning, set an annual budget, coordinate between teams and oversee a general manager if the co-op has one. Quorum (the minimum number of members needed to be participating in a meeting or decision) is often set higher and supermajorities (more than 50%) are required when voting on certain decisions. *Co-ops with an elected board and shared governance often use modified consensus or majority vote decision-making processes.*

Other co-ops, often larger ones, retain very little governance decision-making power for members beyond electing the board and ratifying major decisions at annual or special meetings. These co-ops usually have CEOs or managers that are hired, fired and overseen by the elected board, usually with a majority vote decision-making process.



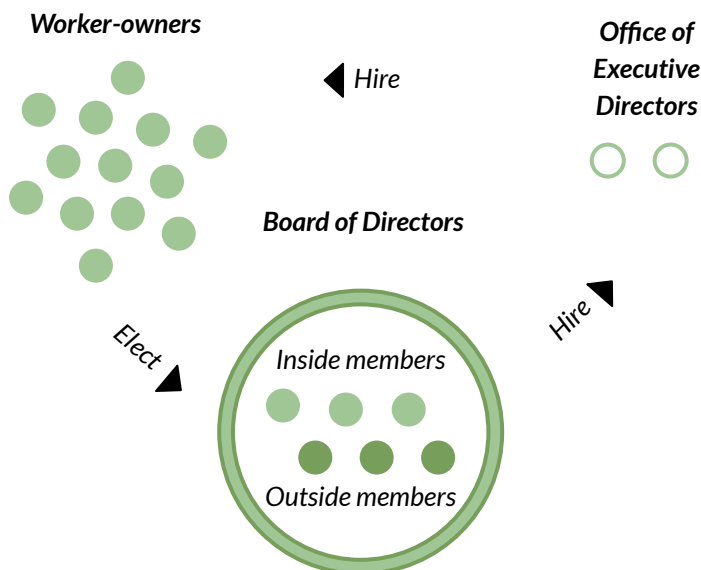
Management Structures

Where boards / general circles are in charge of governance, management is in charge of day to day operations of a co-op.

Collective or rotating management structures are used in workplaces dedicated to non-hierarchical work environments and require extra active empowerment, education and leadership development activities. Accountability is built in but often needs attention (such as peer evaluations, running shared task lists, clear grievance procedures, etc.).

Sociocracy uses a management structure that empowers circles (or committees) around specific work areas and uses general circles for dealing with overlap and inter-circle coordination. [Training, books and more available here.](#)

In co-ops with managers, the “shop floor” day to day functioning can look similar to that of a non-cooperative workplace with supervisors, etc. but remember they are ultimately accountable to the members via the elected board that oversees the management. Some worker co-ops are also unionized for additional worker protection, labor movement solidarity and other resources unions can harness ([more info on union co-ops here](#)).



Decision-Making Processes

Having a clear, democratic way of making decisions in meetings and beyond is key to workplace democracy. There are many different processes, but some best practice that apply across the board are:

1. Have a clear, written process.
2. Practice it often, even when people are in agreement, so when there's disagreement, the process doesn't trip you up.
3. Train yourselves and refresh yourselves regularly on democratic decision-making and the accompanying topic: meeting facilitation.
4. Map out who makes what type of decision using a [Decision-Making Chart](#) and [Governance Matrix](#) (Sample [Governance Matrix here](#)).

Majority vote processes can take many forms, from Robert's Rules of Order (or the simpler, friendlier version Robert's Rules of Order) to custom processes. Some co-ops use tools such as [Loomio](#) to make decisions and carry out polls online and outside of meetings. Be clear in your bylaws and process documents what constitutes quorum and being present, if you allow proxy voting, if ballots are secret, etc.

Pure consensus is where all need to agree with the decision to move forward. This process ensures minority voices are not steamrolled, but be careful around pure consensus and situations with one or two people who refuse to compromise, are causing harm, or intentionally disrupting the process.

Modified consensus sets the intention of the co-op to involve all voices, strive for consensus, but have a fallback voting process if unanimity is not achieved and a timely decision is needed. Sociocracy uses a form of modified consensus and adds the active consent-based process with go-arounds to ensure participation.

Many more resources on decision-making in the [Democratic Management Guide](#).

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