



RUTGERS

School of Management
and Labor Relations

Institute for the Study of
Employee Ownership and Profit Sharing

Just Health: Case Studies of Worker Cooperatives in Health and Care Sectors

Teaching Guide

January 2023

Discussion Questions

1. What are the key features of a worker cooperative?
2. How do worker cooperatives differ from traditional privately owned businesses?
3. Name one external challenge a worker cooperative described in this volume faced. How did the cooperative respond to the external challenge? How do you imagine an investor-owned business (owned by outside investors, not the workers) might have responded to a similar situation? (An external challenge originates outside of the organization. Examples might include market conditions, competitors, laws, regulations, cultural norms, and events.)
4. Name one internal challenge a worker cooperative described in this volume faced. How did the cooperative respond to the internal challenge? How do you imagine a sole proprietorship (a business owned and operated by a single owner with exclusive rights to benefit financially from the business) might have responded to a similar situation?
5. For workers who may face discrimination or exploitation in conventional settings, the cooperative structure may offer greater safety, mutual support, and worker control. Describe an example from the case studies.
6. What are some of the synergies between unions and cooperatives, based on the case studies of AlliedUp and CHCA?
7. During the COVID-19 pandemic, how did any home care cooperatives in Washington State make decisions about how to use Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds?
8. What is a "member share" in a worker cooperative? How do different cooperatives approach their member share? What might be the consequences of setting the cost high versus low?
9. What is a "patronage dividend" in a worker cooperative?
10. Consider two different worker cooperatives from the case studies. How does each govern itself? How do worker owners have input into decisions? Compare and contrast the governance and worker voice approaches in the two cooperatives.

Assignment

Select one cooperative described in this volume and one “traditional” privately held company in the same sector and of approximately the same size.

Briefly describe each organization's size, industry, location, products or services, and demographics.

Describe the ownership structure. (Who owns the business?).

Describe the governance structure. (How are major decisions made?)

Describe the organizational cultures. (What are the shared values?)

In what ways are the two businesses similar?

In what ways are they different?

In your view, what are the advantages of the worker cooperative model for workers? For business functioning? What are the challenges or risks?

Write an essay. Discuss findings in small groups or have students make short presentations to the whole class, followed by discussion.

Sources of Videos about Worker Cooperatives

Our Share: Employee Ownership as a Wealth Sharing Tool

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership>

(See the videos about worker cooperatives in Weeks 2 and 4.)

Employee Ownership Online Education Program

<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/employee-ownership-online-education>

(See Worker Cooperatives Module.)

Becoming Employee Owned: A Small Business Toolkit (Democracy at Work Institute)

<https://becomingemployeeowned.org/>

Curriculum Library for Employee Ownership

<https://cleo.rutgers.edu/>