

Cooperative management and social responsibility: its indissoluble unity of today

Gestión y responsabilidad social cooperativa: su indisoluble unidad de la actualidad

Gestão e responsabilidade social cooperativa: a sua indissolúvel unidade da atualidade

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The world faces one of the most difficult moments of the latest times, marked by a multisectorial crisis, where the predominant international order hinders the facing and solution of the multiple economic, social and environmental problems that human kind lives and that compromise a sustainable development for the future.

To face the present challenges, the national economies have to weave an economic system, where different enterprise forms converge, that with a solidarious and responsible vision, project and develop community, local organizational development initiatives. From this perspective, the cooperative has an essential role, in coherence with its identity and nature, which suppose economic advantages under other organizations, since the values and principles that are materialized in its essence, which is expressed in each concrete reality in a different way, according to the historical, socioeconomic, cultural and political conditions of them.

Hence, of the institutions that integrate the solidarious and social sector of economy, cooperativism has been located as an entity, although it is not the only one, by means of which is possible to face the problems that appear in the society, constituting, according Bastida and Amat (2014) an important agent of socioenterprise development. These institutions carry out productive and trading activities of any nature, in order to improve social lacks represented in health, houses, education, job, in behalf of community.

Cooperative values and principles are the basic precepts to guide the management of cooperatives in a changing scenario, dominated by capitalist relations of production; therefore, these entities differ from the rest of those that make up the social network

due to certain particularities in their administration. These peculiarities, according to Rivera et al. (2012), lie in the first instance in the fact that they arise and develop in accordance with the values of justice and solidarity, in order to obtain economic and social benefits.

In this sense, the referred authors outstand also the role of its maximum government organ: Asamblea General de Asociados, in charge of reproducing its social resources and keep confidence environment among all the actors that participate in management. Another aspect, that identifies cooperative, is the surplus or results distribution way, in correspondence with the entity members' contribution, and it is emphasized, in a particular way, the social responsibility of the members with the other members, employees, their families and the community, where the economic aspect, as base and social aspect, as the end are interwoven.

From the above, it could be deduced that approaching the social-solidarity management of the cooperative presupposes a tautology, however, what it is about is, from a critical evaluation of the elements that could make difficult the realization of its essence, to focus a set of actions towards a social responsibility that legitimizes its identity. In this respect, Bastidas (2019) refers that, thanks to their identity as denominator, they are distinguished from other organizations, and their actors, the cooperative members, can communicate, share concerns and carry out activities with similar organizational bases in any corner of the planet, while building a movement with local, regional, national and even global dimensions.

Cooperative management must combine in a balanced way the needs of its members, their capacities and resources and make it possible to satisfy the needs of third parties as a way of strengthening its results, including its economic results. These results, which serve as a basis for its evolution, reinvestment, efficiency and effectiveness, constitute a premise that does not violate the co-operative principle, but rather is based on it, in the interest of an orientation towards the external that is supportive, democratic, co-operative and a necessary condition for co-operative social responsibility (RSC in Spanish).

An approach to the concept of enterprise social responsibility (RSE in Spanish), in general, presupposes the evaluation of multiple points of view reflected in the literature which, in all cases, recognizes the need to consider it as an indispensable factor for sustainable development. According to Albors and Paricio (2016), it is a business philosophy based on business culture and identity, which guides all actions of the organization towards satisfying the expectations of those involved, extending beyond economic sustainability and compliance with the law, assuming ethical and human commitments. This definition is reinforced by the idea of Antelo and Alfonso (2015), for whom social responsibility represents a continuous commitment to contribute to sustainable economic development, improving the quality of life of employees and their families, as well as that of the local community and society in general.

In the case of cooperatives, social responsibility today requires new readings; it is an act that is totally consistent with their form of management, otherwise their socio-economic duality, as well as their values and principles, would not be realized, aspects that differentiate them from the rest of the organizations of contemporary society.

From this perspective it is pertinent to pay attention to the definition of RSC, proposed by Alfonso et al. (2008) which, highlighting essential elements of this process, considers it as the obligatory and conscious commitment that the company has to contribute to the development and improvement of the quality of life of its workers, employees, managers, their families, the community and society on the basis of efficient and effective economic processes. In relation to the above, it is pointed out that compliance with the cooperative principles requires cooperatives to have an instrument or mechanism for self-evaluation, specifically a social balance sheet, which considers both its economic and social aspects, since most of our organizations have economic management tools, which in many cases are shared by other business forms and do not respond or contribute to the consolidation of the cooperative ideal, to the consolidation of their true identity, an element that is unquestionably urgent at present.

When comparing the cooperative principles with the elements proposed by the European Commission for the promotion of RSE, Server and Capó (2009), there are some points of agreement, among which the following stand out

- The recognition of the voluntary nature of RS, to which is added its conscious character
- The need for credible and transparent socially responsible practices
- Contributions from community participation and intervention to RS
- Balanced and comprehensive approach to RS including economic, social and ecological aspects
- Participation in management processes

In order to evaluate RSC, responsible behavior at the organizational level and the environment, it is necessary to comply with cooperative values and self-regulation; concern for the quality of life in the company, based on an adequate working climate and participatory management; attention to the environment and appropriate management of environmental impact; implementation of integrated community management, participation in social action and development works; improvement of marketing mechanisms for quality products; adequate use of financial resources, cooperative assets, and responsible investment; respect for human rights, racial and gender non-discrimination, the fight against child exploitation; confronting corruption and compliance with laws.

In this line, the statement of Server and Capó (2009) is relevant, as they agree that the very nature of cooperatives leads to a socially responsible operation. When analyzing the cooperative principles, there are several examples, which denote their full identification with the concepts linked to SR policies and, as a consequence, it can be deduced that cooperatives are privileged in terms of the application of SR fundamentals.

In order for cooperatives to take advantage of this situation, in which they have an advantage over other entities, it is necessary for them to exploit their peculiarities to the full and make an effort to achieve the integration of SR policies with their integral management, in the search for synergies and mutual benefits with the direct beneficiaries, with the community in which they operate, without abandoning their form of administration and operation, as opposed to those actions where the maximization of economic benefit is the sole priority.

The main objective pursued by RSC is in line with the positive impact that these practices generate in the different areas with which a company has a relationship, while contributing to increasing its competitiveness and sustainability in a turbulent and contradictory world, which generates challenges for the business system and for cooperatives in particular, which can be summarized as the need to:

- To innovate in a coherent, coordinated and sustained manner over time in order to create value in a lasting way and obtain better results and impact from the R & D process.
- To promote cooperative education processes, aimed at generating talent and the comprehensive training of cooperative members who are bearers of solidarity values and have the professional skills that are the basic pillar of business and territorial competitiveness.
- To develop social intervention and community development projects that contribute to social and labor integration, training and employment at a territorial level.
- Encourage economic development initiatives, based on productive linkages, diversification of production and services, greater productivity, achieving higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness.
- Encourage socio-cultural development through artistic-cultural initiatives and the development of creativity, based on indigenous traditions and roots.
- To contribute, as part of its social programs, to the health care of the population. It is worth noting that, in social responsibility practices, in health entities, some regularities are determined such as the convergence between the nature of the health service and the concept of SR, based on the development of cultural aspects in the organizations, in addition to ethical and environmental aspects, as well as the necessary social control to achieve coverage and quality in the service to society, referred to by Terán et al. (2017).
- The cooperative enterprise must contribute to the consolidation of the municipality as a decisive link for food self-sustainability, in a world where food and nutritional security are a chimera and food production is a vital aspect at present.

Finally, from the above, it should be noted that:

- There is a clear relationship between management, based on principles and values, and RSC, and these entities can become references in their application.
- The management and social responsibility of the cooperatives have as a premise an adequate management of training, formation and cooperative education that provides the organization with highly qualified people in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, allows the improvement of managers and collaborators in the performance of their jobs, trains them to face the future, prepares the conditions for better interpersonal relations in the companies and contributes to the development of the commitment with the entity through greater competitiveness and appropriate knowledge that pays tribute to the corporate social responsibility (Labrador Machín et al., 2019).
- The contemporary crisis is the moment when the entities of the sector must rethink the unity of the cooperative movement as a basis to guarantee our action in society, be increasingly visible and ensure welfare, prosperity and economic democracy for all, based on responsible social management and intrinsic

solidarity as aspects that complement and presuppose each other in an indissoluble way.

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