

Governance and operations obstacles faced by student-run cooperatives at UC Berkeley

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ABSTRACT

UC Berkeley is an incubator for student-run cooperatives, many of which are successful but struggle to overcome certain obstacles to governance and operations. This paper aims to understand these business hurdles and their extent of impact, potential tradeoffs if addressed, and possible solutions. I focus on three organizations: ReUSE, the Berkeley Student Food Collective, and the Berkeley Student Cooperative. I conducted surveys asking about demographics, project flow, Board effectiveness, manager work levels, and mission statement success, and held interviews of managers in the organizations. I found that these student-run cooperatives suffer from: (1) lack of long-term planning due to high turnover of student leaders; (2) hindered success of projects due to poor communications, momentum, and engagement; (3) limited member understanding of Board processes due to information not flowing effectively; (4) overworked managers due to lack of support and capacity; and (5) members' unfamiliarity with the mission statements due to selective understanding. Many of these issues revolved around communication, accountability, and engagement. There are solutions that can help these organizations to work towards overcoming these barriers and to foster a successful future, and these proposed changes include empowering staff managers, implementing task forces, improving online resources, and re-envisioning performance reviews.

KEYWORDS

democratic decision-making, institutional knowledge, non-profit businesses, Board of Directors, sustainable models.

INTRODUCTION

As the number one public university in the world (Flanigan and Morse 2013), UC Berkeley is known for having ambitious students who are willing to challenge themselves and their community. This enterprising mentality has led to the founding of various student-run, cooperative businesses both on and off campus (Lillian 1971, Oatfield 2010), which have been proven to be financially and operationally feasible businesses (Lillian 1971). The current, established student-run cooperatives are: ReUSE, the Berkeley Student Food Collective, and the Berkeley Student Cooperative (BSC). By providing unparalleled work experience to students and various affordable services (Glick 2013), student-run cooperatives are essential elements of the UC Berkeley community. ReUSE, run by two student managers and many student volunteers, is a shared goods facilitator that started in 2000. The Food Collective, operated by a professional Operations Manager and about 50 student volunteers, is a small grocery store that services mainly UC affiliates (but anyone can shop there) was opened in 2010. The BSC, managed by both student leaders and a professional staff, is a large housing organization with 1300 student members who live and/or board their 17 houses and 3 apartments, and was founded in 1933 (S&P 2013). Many students seek out these organizations for cooperative lifestyle and work environment, and view them as symbols of Berkeley's forward-thinking culture (Lillian 1971).

All three cooperatives are currently facing substantive changes to operations, arguably caused indirectly by the budget crisis, which has led to increased tuition and has limited the University's provisional funding, leading to an undergraduate student body comprising wealthier students who are less dependent on University-provided educational subsidies (NCPPE 2002). The criticalness of this growth and change period calls for an assessment of the adequacy of the leadership structure and management systems of UC Berkeley's cooperatives. First, I identify the changes: (1) ReUSE is responding to strong interest in selling and buying used goods (within the Cal community) by negotiating with University officials and student government leaders for on-campus storefront space; a storefront opening is likely to happen in the next two years. (2) The Food Collective is considering moving to a larger location to accommodate increased sales demands from students who are willing and able to pay for sustainably-produced foods (BSFC 2013). (3) The BSC has hired consultants to facilitate staff management expansion and major governance philosophy changes in order to respond to inefficient processes established during

rapid growth phases and to prepare for increased future demand associated with increasing class sizes and overcrowded University housing (BSC 2006, BSC 2013). It is a pivotal time for these three Berkeley co-operatives, and when drastic change happens the issues and obstacles of governance manifest themselves. What distinguishes these organizations from any other retail store or housing provider is the student-run and cooperative/democratic aspects of their governance. The Berkeley community takes pride in the success of this governance model, but a critical review of how the model potentially inhibits the organizations is missing.

In preparation for sweeping changes, the student-run cooperatives of Berkeley have already internally examined and identified problems with their current structures – processes that involved creating new positions (ReUSE), adjusting budget allocations (Food Collective), and working with consultants (BSC). The most significant governance and operational obstacles for organizations of this kind are: (1) turnover of student leaders, (2) inefficient decision-making processes, and (3) overworked managers (Papadopoulos 2003). My experiences with the cooperatives in question (as a Coordinator with ReUSE, Finance Officer of the Food Collective, and President of the BSC) have led me to recognize how the problems play out in the particular cooperatives in question. To put the importance of the first obstacle in perspective, note that one of the most valuable attributes of human capital is retained knowledge (Chetty et. al 2006), but in a student-run business the leadership turns over every year or two, thus forcing new leaders to frequently face the learning curve. Inefficient decision-making processes cause leadership bodies, both individuals and groups, to waste time being fixated on disproportionately small decisions, and long-term, impactful discussions and decisions are delayed or not addressed (Wadsworth 2007). As for the third obstacle, managers become overworked because of organizational failures to prioritize or delegate (BSC 2006). Additionally, cooperatives are held to high standards of democratic process and member input, meaning that managers cannot efficiently make decisions based on their expertise – rather, they must present their work progress to many people or groups before moving forward (BSC 2013). Faced with problems of governance and operations, student and professional managers of student-run cooperatives lack support and often burnout quickly (BSC 2013). Identifying these problems and obstacles is relatively straightforward, but the literature on these governance topics lacks a systematic assessment and documentation of how they affect student-run cooperatives.

The research for this thesis was focused on gathering perceptions from elected student and hired professional managers of the three identified cooperatives. By designing and mass distributing a survey that focused on areas that I hypothesized to be obstacles, I was able to analyze the extent to which members perceived them as issues. Additionally, I compared the three organizations against each other to determine if various factors (e.g. size, structure) affected how obstacles manifest differently. To fill in any information gaps presented by the survey results, I conducted interviews. Through analysis of survey and interview data from experienced managers of the cooperatives, I assessed the tradeoffs of and suggested solutions for the identified obstacles.

The central research objective was to study ReUSE, the Food Collective, and the BSC so as to answer the research question: What are the significant obstacles to governance and operations faced by student-run cooperatives at UC Berkeley? Once the obstacles were identified, follow-up questions for each include: How is this an obstacle? What are the tradeoffs or potential benefits from these obstacles for the organization? How can they be overcome? This research was done in light of the current, internal work to improve the governance processes at the Food Collective and BSC. Additionally, each obstacle was put into perspective via metrics analysis. The metric to which I measured the effects of the obstacles is the extent to which the organization is perceived to be meeting its mission statement. The desired governance changes have potential to refocus time and energy more efficiently, thereby allowing leadership to address large goals like growth and fulfillment of the mission statement. My personal involvement in the organizations drives the ultimate goal of this paper to understand and advise the cooperatives of interest so that they exist in Berkeley for decades to come.

METHODS

Study System

My study system consisted of the students and staff managers who run the three student-run cooperatives at UC Berkeley that I have identified: ReUSE, the Berkeley Student Food Collective, and the Berkeley Student Cooperative. Most student leaders are full-time students, and most managers were former members of the organizations who graduated and were hired. I chose these three cooperatives because they represent a range of organizational characteristics (Table 1).

They varied by size (the BSC is the largest student-housing cooperative in the country), managers to student leaders ratio, student leaders to members ratio, and source of revenue stream (grant funding versus financial independence). By studying all three, I was able to control for different characteristics and avoid bias.

Table 1: Summaries of the cooperatives. I chose three student-run cooperatives to study for this paper.



Age	13 years	3 years	80 years
# of Managers	2 students	1 professional	25 professionals
# of Members	15 volunteers	150 volunteers	1330 members
Revenue Sources	Grants, sporadic clothing sales	Grocery sales, catering, grants	Member room & board rent

Data Collection

I gathered input via surveys from many cooperative member leaders and managers, and used interviews to gather details and follow-up clarifications. To get feedback from a broad range of stakeholders, I distributed a survey to the cooperatives' student leadership. After collecting results, I selected individuals for interviews in order to investigate claims made or discrepancies in survey responses.

Survey

To understand how governance and operations obstacles affect the three student-run cooperatives in question, I used Google Forms platform to conduct an online survey of student leaders with elected positions in the organizations (Appendix A). The survey could be completed in about 5 minutes and was sent to recent, past, and present student leaders and managers of

ReUSE, the Food Collective, and the BSC. Response formats included open-ended, selection from a list, and ranked preferences. The survey asked about five main points. First, it asked for respondent's name and level of involvement in the organization, including position title, hours worked per week, and length of tenure. This information allowed me to categorize the responses by organization, function, commitment, and institutional knowledge. Second, it asked about successfulness of project flows, focusing on whether or not pathways are slow and inhibit operations. Third, it asked about governing Board effectiveness. I wanted to understand the ways in which Boards affect decision-making processes and success. This information helped to determine what types of operational culture and policy changes could be implemented to facilitate effective long-range plan management by co-op Boards. Fourth, it asked about whether and extent to which managers are perceived to be overworked. Managers are integral partners with student leaders, and it was important to understand whether they are overburdened and how that impacts their ability to manage successfully. I wanted to know if empowering staff managers (and removing some bureaucracy) would support them in alleviating work pressure. Fifth, it asked about degree to which the organizations are meeting their mission statements. This question was very broad and unspecific. The goal here was to gauge the organizations' overall success, given that obstacles exist. Taking this question apart, I wanted to separate what is being done well from what is unaddressed.

I collected 56 survey responses, 80% from BSC members, 13% from Food Collective members, and 7% from ReUSE members. The survey was sent to all house and apartment manager teams in the BSC, so responses came from all over the organization but not from alumni. For the Food Collective and for ReUSE, the survey was predominantly sent to past managers and Board members.

Interviews

To expand on survey responses, I conducted interviews, selecting respondents based on people's positions within the organizations (e.g. student leaders from each of the three organizations). The data goals outlined in the previous section for each survey data type were impossible to gather with only numerical survey responses – that was where interviews became

necessary. The questions varied depending on the interviewee (position, experience, survey responses, etc.) and what research questions I was hoping to address (Appendix B).

The first person I interviewed was the Operations Manager from the Food Collective, who, when she was a student, was a Board member and the Membership Coordinator. I asked questions about her experience in the Food Collective, what ways the organization has and has not grown, whether it seems to be a sustainable business, and important qualities that her position demands.

The second person I interviewed was a Co-Manager from ReUSE. I asked similar questions, but additionally asked if she felt that the volunteer staff model is sustainable for the organization.

The third person I interviewed was a Vice President from the Berkeley Student Cooperative, who has held many central-level leadership positions over the last four years including Board member, Vice President, and President. Because the BSC is a much larger and more established organization, I asked different additional questions (relative to those above) about governance obstacles for a large organization, like what the most essential element to successful communication is.

Participant Observation

As someone with so much governance and operational experience in each of the three organizations of question, I included my own personal analysis. I spent much of my undergraduate career on the Boards of the Food Collective and BSC, so I experienced the obstacles faced by the organizations. This background allowed me to create an effective survey and to target key people for interviews. Additionally, I used my knowledge about viability and existence of potential changes to suggest improvements to the organizations to overcome the identified obstacles.

Data Analysis

To analyze the surveys and interviews, I made inferences based on numerical shorthand results from the surveys while considering the insight provided by the interviews. Where relevant, I calculated statistical summaries and looked at distribution of responses across organizations. For the obstacles identified by survey respondents, I used interviews to gather more detailed data on

how the obstacles manifest differently across the cooperatives. Also, since most data collected from the survey was numerical, I was able to objectively compare results across organizations or across other characteristics (e.g. length of leadership).

More specifically, certain parts of the survey corresponded to certain sub-questions (Table 2). Parts 2, 3, and 4 helped to identify the significant governance and operations obstacles; the “why or why not” parts helped me to understand potential tradeoffs that the obstacles offered; part 5 answered the mission statement sub-question; and part 1 provided context for all responses, and the opportunity to discover trends related to tenure, involvement, commitment, etc.

Table 2: Summary of collection and analysis. Each part of the survey answers part of the overall question or sub-questions of my thesis.

Survey Part	Collection	Analysis
1	Demographics	Context for all responses
2	Successfulness of project flows	Identify operations obstacles
3	Governing Board effectiveness	Identify governance obstacles
4	Extent managers are overworked	Identify operations obstacles
5	Meeting mission statement	Organizational success (sub-question)

All of my analysis occurred in Excel. First, I looked at the distribution of member and manager tenure across organizations, in increments of years, and of weekly time commitment. Then, I used color-coded analysis to understand why members did or did not feel that projects flowed successfully to completion. This involved categorizing each response as “yes”, “no”, or “somewhat” based on the overall tone of the response, then teasing out whether the response implied that only the respondent’s own projects flowed successfully and whether the respondent felt that people resources were imperative for a project to flow well. Then, I analyzed the Board effectiveness responses for the BSC and Food Collective (ReUSE does not have a formal Board because it is not a stand-alone corporation) separately and overall. I also categorized each respondent as someone with or without experience on Board (based on position title), and looked at any differences in average approval ranking by work area. To measure whether or not respondents felt that management was overworked, I looked at the breakdown of responses across the gradient of survey response options. I also calculated what proportion of respondents felt the various given (in the survey) reasons applied to their organization. Similarly, I broke down the

cooperativeness question by survey option response. Lastly, I analyzed the mission statement question by averaging responses for each organization and overall.

To determine the best practices suggestions for the cooperatives, I used triangulation of survey results, interview responses, and my participant observation. This three-pronged approach allowed me to involve my knowledge of the organizations while also backing up my claims with data. I assessed the results of the data collection and analysis in the context of my experiences.

In summary, analysis of the survey data allowed me to identify the governance and operations obstacles, and analysis of the interview data allowed me to answer questions about extent, manifestation type, potential tradeoffs, and overall success of the impacts as well as potential to overcome the obstacles of these non-profits to fulfill their mission statements. I strived to understand what similar and different obstacles cooperatives face, how those impact organizational success, and what can be done to mediate these issues in the future.

RESULTS

Data Collection

Survey

The majority (83%) of respondents had been cooperative members for at least a year, but of those only 40% had been an elected manager for over a year (Figure 1). 60% of respondents committed 7 or 10 hours per week to their elected manager position (Figure 3). The distribution of time commitment roughly follows a normal distribution.

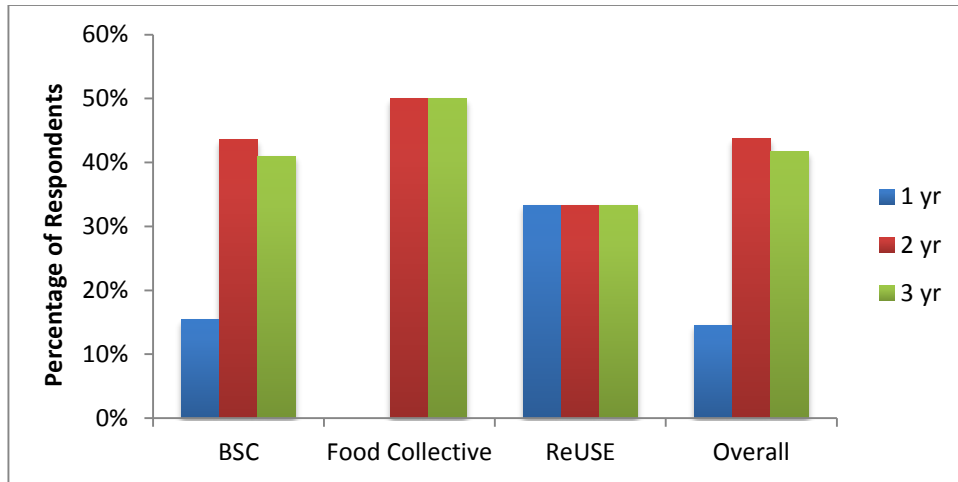


Figure 1. Membership tenure of respondents. This shows the distribution of membership tenure (number of years of membership) for the three organizations and for overall.

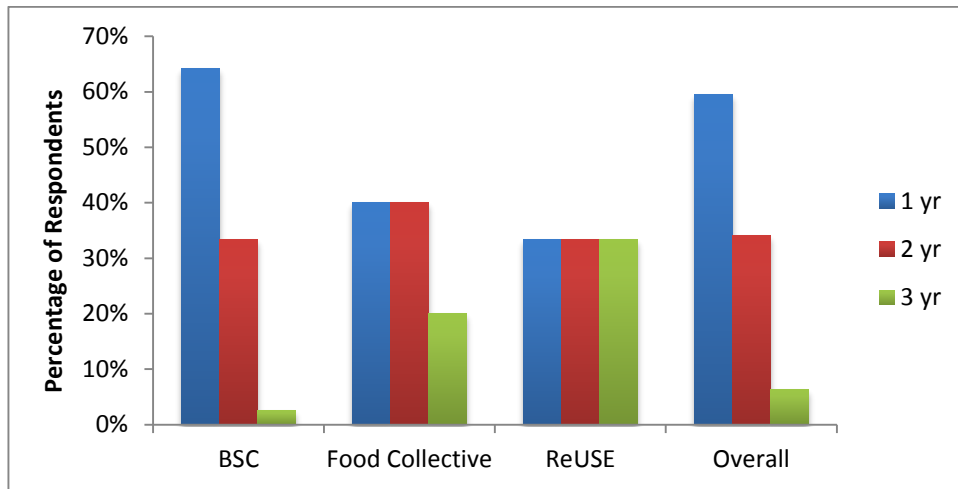


Figure 2. Management tenure of respondents.

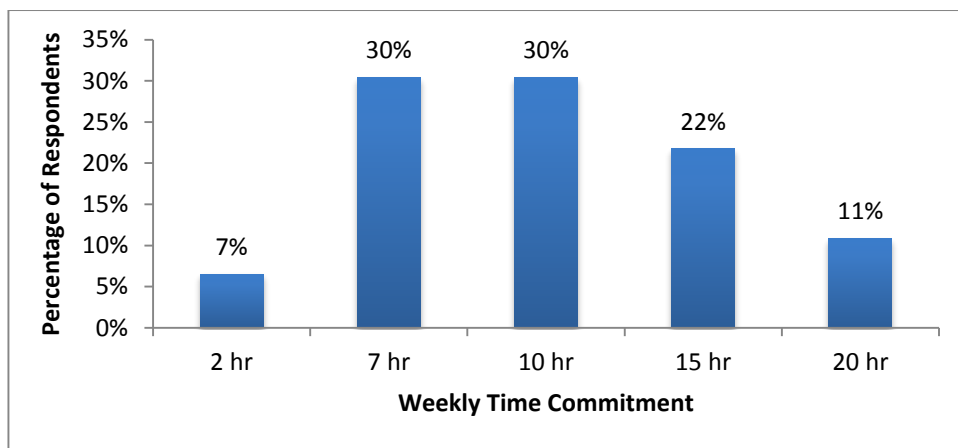


Figure 3. Time commitment to the organizations. Respondents estimated how many hours per week they committed to their elected manager position. This is a combination of all three organizations. No respondents answered with “3 hrs/week”, which was a survey option.

Only 12% of respondents felt that the organizations' projects did not flow successfully to completion, however many (47%) had clarifying reservations about project flow, even if they felt it was usually successful. A sizeable portion of respondents (12%) felt that their own projects flowed well, despite other projects within the organizations having trouble. 65% felt that the success of a project relied heavily on people resources, including enthusiasm (of project organizers), member interest, and follow-through. On that same train of thought, some respondents felt that if projects had high momentum and leaders with understanding of organizational structure, then those projects had a much higher likelihood of coming to fruition. One highly dedicated member of the BSC (a Vice President who commits 20+ hours per week) clarified that sometimes a project may come to fruition, but rarely with the full original intentions – that often a “brutal pragmatism” will effect serious change in a project's outcome.

Respondents ranked the cooperatives' Boards of Directors an overall 3.64 out of 5.00 for all of the work areas, or areas the Boards are tasked with (Figure 4). Respondents who had experience on one of the Board of Directors had higher approval responses (Figure 5). Overall, approval was 4.7% higher from respondents with Board experience than those without. The lowest scoring work area was communication with membership.

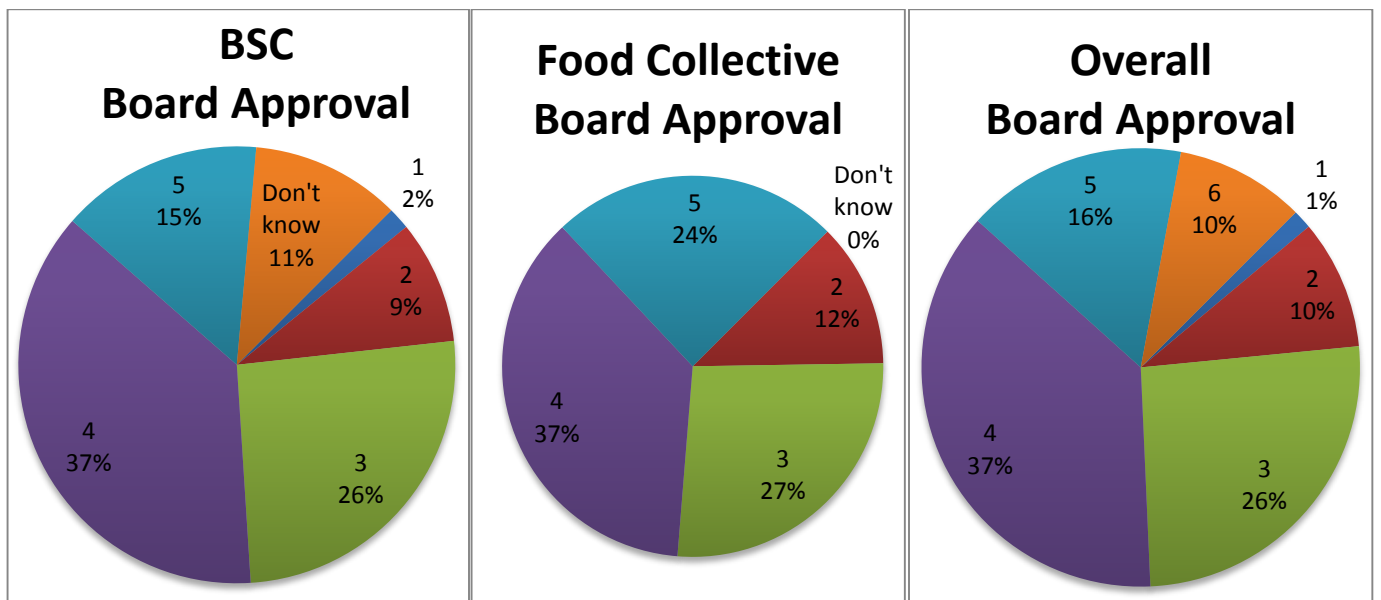


Figure 4. Overall Board approval by organization. This includes “don't know” responses. The average approval for the BSC was 3.62, for the Food Collective was 3.73, and overall was 3.64.

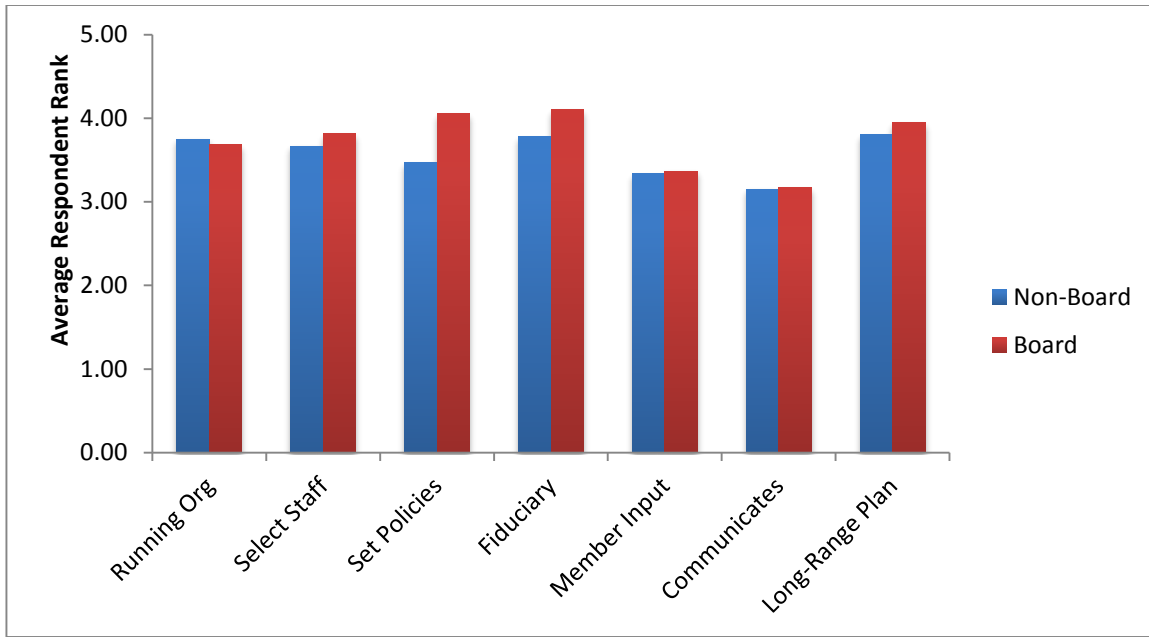


Figure 5. Perception of Board work success, distinguishing by Board experience.

Respondents from all organizations felt that managers are definitely (42%) or at least somewhat (33%) overworked (Figure 6). When asked why staff managers are overworked, 7% agreed that managers are un-empowered, 44% agreed that managers are unsupported, 53% agreed that management capacity is low, and 24% agreed that managers lack resources.

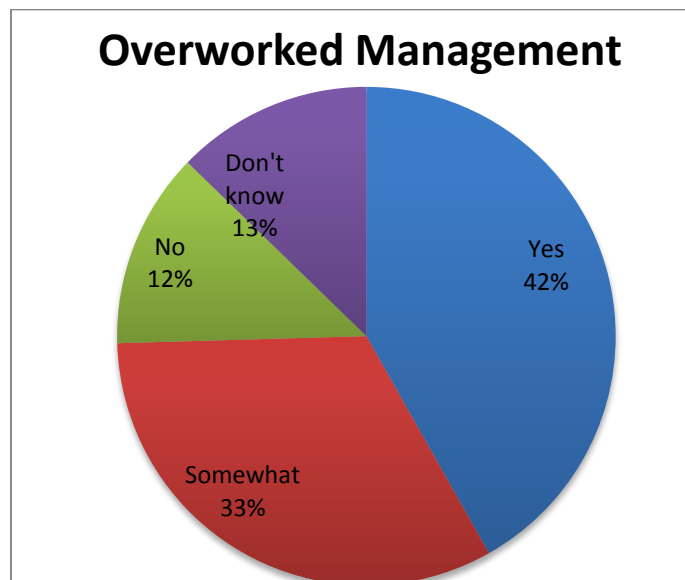


Figure 6. Level of which staff management is overworked. This includes responses from all three organizations.

Almost all respondents felt that the organizations promoted cooperativeness, with 49% responding “yes” and 47% responding “somewhat” (Figure 7). The most common reason why not was related to size and inability for the co-op to involve all members.

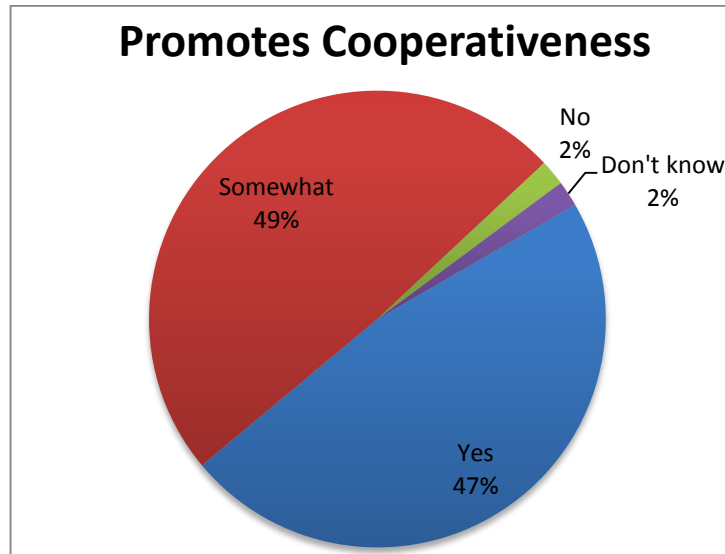


Figure 7. Level to which organization promotes cooperativeness. This includes responses from all three organizations.

Members of ReUSE felt the organization was meeting its mission statement, while members of the BSC and Food Collective felt significantly less so (Figure 8). Overall, respondents felt that the organizations were meeting mission statements at a 3.55 out of 5. There was no significant difference in average ranking from respondents with experience on Board (3.59) and those without (3.53).

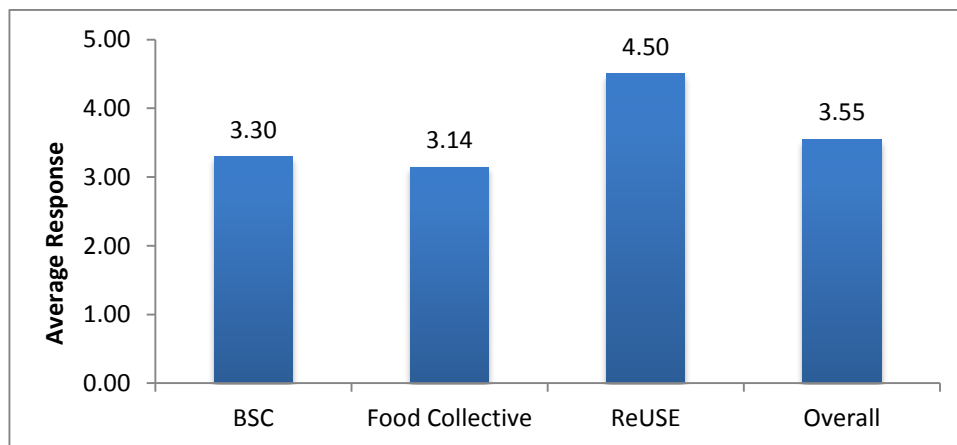


Figure 8. Overall effectiveness of meeting organizations’ mission statements.

Interviews

The Food Collective Operations Manager was very enthusiastic about the Food Collective's potential to grow, but worried that the current Board and manager structure was unsustainable. She felt that the organization had grown financially and somewhat beyond its brick-and-mortar limits, but that it has failed to plan for the long term. She feels that her position demands too much of one person, and does not allow the Operations Manager to work on expansion opportunities because the day-to-day demands are overwhelming.

The ReUSE Co-Manager emphasized that ReUSE has changed a lot since she left her manager position. She felt that it is a relatively new organization that is still finding its niche on campus. She worries that the structure – two managers and many volunteers that turnover every semester – prevents continuity and long-term planning.

The BSC Vice President focused on the BSC's history of successfully providing low-cost housing, but conceded that the organization faces many governance obstacles that prevent adequate long-term planning. Much of the BSC's membership seeks house-level manager positions, but few seek central-level opportunities (e.g. Board member, Vice President), leaving many of the Board member positions to be filled by newer members who were elected unopposed. The BSC is large and has many governing committees, but it needs to better empower those committees to expedite the decision-making process and reduce bureaucracy.

Data Analysis

About half of the respondents who were members for over a year became elected managers in the cooperatives. 82% had been members longer than they had been elected managers, indicating that the majority of co-op members wait at least a semester to run for a manager position. The size of the cooperative is inversely related to the proportion of long-term managers. In other words, the majority of managers in the BSC had elected positions for 1-2 years, but as the organization's size decreases, we see the Food Collective and then ReUSE exhibit more equal distribution of management tenure (Figure 2). Few (11%) respondents commit the substantial amount of 20 hours per week to the cooperatives, but that the bulk (60%) of people-hours comes from managers offering the medium commitment option (Figure 3).

The Food Collective Board had zero “Don’t know” responses, while 11% of BSC responses were “Don’t know”. Responses from cooperative members with experience being on the Board of Directors were higher than responses from members without Board experience. Interestingly, both types of members felt similarly about Board’s success at communicating with membership and ranked it lowest of the work areas (Figure 5).

ReUSE had the highest approval for meeting its mission statement, while both the BSC and Food Collective were relatively on par (Figure 8). Both the BSC and Food Collective have mission statements that strive for providing low-cost food/services.

DISCUSSION

Student-run cooperatives face many challenges to succeed as independent businesses, yet there are three cooperatives at UC Berkeley that have a proven ability to overcome these obstacles and thrive as successful businesses. The various governance and operations obstacles are not insurmountable, and mainly require better communication and more member involvement to be adequately addressed. To ensure proper flow of project work, recruitment of managers to participate and transparency with membership is key. Many members perceived Board of Directors as mysterious, making it easier to be critical of the Board’s work. As a longstanding goal, all organizations need to refocus resources on meeting their mission statements by allocating funds towards, focusing leadership’s time on, and centering goals around the fulfillment of the mission. Although these points may be considered common knowledge amongst members and the findings were not unexpected, these conclusions may not have been made without the systematic assessment of the three organizations. Some of the differences between organizations were surprising; for example, the tenure of managers was greater in smaller organizations. Membership from all three felt similarly about the organizations’ perceived success of project flow, work of the Board, workload of staff managers, ability to meet the mission statements, and ability to promote a cooperative spirit.

Organization Size Can Impede Institutional Knowledge

Members of the student-run cooperatives generally waited a semester or more before running for an elected position. This benefits the organizations by allowing some training time, but the tradeoff is that this also becomes an obstacle for big organizations with taller leadership ladders (Cotterill and Gherty 1982). The small organizations (Food Collective and ReUSE) were able to recruit managers for longer periods of time. These cooperatives have few levels of leadership hierarchy, so a member can reach a manager or Board member position relatively quickly, retain that position, and be a source of institutional knowledge (Wadsworth 2007). On the contrary, the large organization (BSC) has many levels of elected leadership. It generally takes a member many semesters or years to experience all levels: member with no elected positions, minor house-level manager, major house-level manager, Board member, and Executive Board member. With the high turnover of students flowing through the organizations, this can be a limitation for retaining experienced managers in large organizations (Homes 1996). As the Food Collective Operations Manager pointed out, the more members that partake in the responsibility of running a cooperative, the more difficult accountability becomes. At some point, the increase in size may not be worth the loss of shared commitment (Glick 2013).

Development Requires Communication and Collaboration

A lack of transparency and communication among members and managers contributed to a perception of project development failure. Many students join cooperatives seeking to actively engage in projects, but harnessing and focusing that energy can be difficult (Cotterill and Gherty 1982). Across all organizations, members sought more teamwork on projects. But, it appears that a lack of communication was the biggest barrier to collaboration (Glick 2013). For example, the BSC Vice President described a situation in which alumni, members of one house, and members of another house were all separately working on improving the BSC's internal website, but the various groups were not aware of the others' intentions and failed to pool resources. Additionally, the issue of garnering momentum for projects is a large obstacle to projects' success. An effective work timeline requires carry through from project conception to completion, but that can be difficult in cooperatives where responsibilities are diffused amongst many members (Holmes and

Schmitz 1996). Finally, the issue of engagement, while less difficult for smaller organizations like ReUSE and the Food Collective that students join seeking to work (Oatfield 2010), can be a hurdle for cooperatives like the BSC where many members are just looking for housing. Overall, it seems that many issues associated with project development in cooperatives can be solved with more organization and communication around defined organizational projects and related working groups. Currently the BSC is addressing the obstacle by creating Board-level task forces, which define a specific problem, goal, and timeline, and recruit for members (as well as alumni and managers) who understand the commitment and are energetic about the project.

Democratizing the Board of Directors

Members had limited understanding of work done by the Board of Directors, which was a consequential obstacle to governance and cooperative member involvement (finding supported by Wadsworth 2007). Communication was perceived as the lowest performing Board work area. This can be attributed to the Boards' failure to reach out and members' failure to seek information, a double-edged sword that represents the tradeoff between Board energy spent on engagement and on decision-making (Cotterill and Gherty 1982). Many respondents in all three cooperatives did not know about their Boards' work, suggesting that information was not flowing successfully from Board to membership. Again, the blame can be directed at Board members and members, showing that failures in information flow are not uni-directional and is potentially a case-by-case question. As with other obstacles, size plays a big role (Bryson 1988). The BSC is large and spans many houses and apartments, which inhibits information flow more than in smaller organizations. The size factor may explain lower overall survey scores for the BSC Board approval.

Staff Managers are Resources to Student Leaders

Staff managers across all three organizations were perceived as being overworked, mainly because student members rely heavily on the continuity and commitment of staff managers to pick up a lot of the slack (finding supported by Wadsworth 2007). Recognizing the necessity of staff managers, members want to provide more support and capacity to the managers. But that would require more resources like money and institutional knowledge (Oatfield 2010), which are already

in short supply. There are tradeoffs when allocating resources, and organizations face decisions concerning how to support staff managers and address the operational obstacles of overworked managers while also prioritizing money (which could be used to host trainings) and institutional knowledge towards the membership (Holmes and Schmitz 1996). Those who did not agree that staff managers are overworked did not feel knowledgeable about the topic. Based on these findings, it seems that organizations should ensure that staff manager performance reviews are reported to students who have worked closely with the staff managers, and that job descriptions and staff structures be reviewed routinely to ensure that support mechanisms exist.

Meeting the Ultimate Goal: the Mission

Overall, despite shortcomings, members felt that the organizations were meeting their mission statements. ReUSE, more so than the other two, impressed its members with its success. Unfortunately many members of the cooperatives are not familiar with the organizations' mission statements. Thus, it is possible that some members determine whether or not the organizations are meeting their own impression and interpretation of what the mission is. Interestingly, managers and members do not differ significantly on this issue. This is likely because members are less involved in the governance and operations, and thus less doubtful about the organizations' success. Alternatively, managers are hyper aware of the many ways in which organizations do and do not meet the missions, and so do not tend to have a unidirectional opinion, but rather have very mixed opinions depending on which areas of the mission they identify most with or perceive as the most important.

Limitations and Future Directions

These findings can be applied to other current and future student-run businesses at UC Berkeley, but less so at other universities. UC Berkeley is unique in that student organizations are extremely popular and self-sufficient. Students and student groups/organizations at other universities may not be as empowered or proactive. Another limitation stems from the fact that this research relied heavily on online responses to emails; focus groups could have been useful in generating more extensive data.

Many obstacles exist for student-run cooperatives, but, most importantly, more financial analysis is needed. The long-term viability of these organizations depends on their ability to generate more revenues than costs. This is particularly important for growing organizations like the Food Collective and ReUSE. Although many popular governance decisions revolve around food sourcing and cooperative culture because members can easily relate to those topics, setting organization budgets is a key decision. Future research should explore financial management and budget setting processes in these types of cooperatives. The decision-making flows of creating, vetting, and approving the budget should be mapped out, and the growth of revenues and costs be tracked over time.

Conclusion

Student-run cooperatives at UC Berkeley are flagship organizations for campuses nationwide, yet many obstacles to success still exist. In conducting this research, I have identified five key obstacles that affect all these organizations, and to a degree that inhibits growth:

1. Lack of long-term planning due to high turnover of student leaders;
2. Hindered success of projects due to poor communication, momentum, and engagement;
3. Limited member understanding of Board processes due ineffective information flows;
4. Overworked managers due to lack of support and capacity;
5. Members' unfamiliarity with the mission statements due to selective understanding.

I have also, through my research and experiences, determined best practices that can help these organizations overcome these obstacles. These include:

1. **Staff manager roles:** Increase reliance on continuity of staff managers and empower staff managers to advise student leadership. Guidance from staff managers should be considered in governance decisions, even if staff managers are not students.
2. **Working groups:** Implement task forces to focus the organizations' resources and attention on key projects.
3. **Improved online resources:** Help members remain updated on work done by the Board. This avoids information overload but provides space for interested members to feel empowered to learn about the governance decisions.

4. **Well-balanced reviews:** Re-envision staff manager performance reviews to be goal-oriented and used as a tool to provide more support.
5. **Focus on mission statement:** All governance and operations decisions should further the mission statement. Additionally, post the mission statement around the cooperative space so that it becomes more familiar.

These patterns of obstacles were consistent across organizations. I hope that other student-run cooperatives can build on this information to pre-emptively address the issues. Ultimately, I hope that UC Berkeley fosters many more student-run cooperative businesses.

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APPENDIX A: Survey

1. What is your name?
 - a. _____
2. What organization are you a member of?
 - a. Select one: ReUSE, BSFC, BSC
3. What is your position within the organization?
 - a. _____
4. How many semesters have you been a member?
 - a. Select one: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
5. How many semesters have you been an elected manager?
 - a. Select one: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
6. How many hours/week do you commit to the organization?
 - a. Select one: 2, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20
7. Generally, do projects flow successfully from conception to implementation? Why or why not?
 - a. _____
8. Rate the effectiveness of the Board of Directors in these areas:
 - a. Oversees the running of the organization
 - b. Selects the staff management
 - c. Sets all policies
 - d. Acts in the best interest of the whole organization
 - e. Seeks member input
 - f. Communicates Board actions to the membership
 - g. Sets long-range goals and plans
 - h. Select one: 1 (ineffective), 2, 3, 4, 5 (effective), Don't know
9. Do you think that the organization's staff managers are overworked?
 - a. Yes, somewhat, no, don't know
 - b. If you answered "Yes", why? Select all that apply:
 - i. Management is un-empowered (Board micro-manages)
 - ii. Management is unsupported (high student-leadership turnover is high)

- iii. Management capacity is low (individual positions have too many expectations)
 - iv. Management lacks resources (the organization doesn't offer any/enough training or career development)
 - v. Other: _____
 - c. If you answered "No", why?
 - i. _____
10. Does the organization's structure successfully promote cooperativeness?
- a. Yes, somewhat, no, don't know
 - i. If you answered "Yes", why? Select all that apply:
 - ii. Democratic decision-making
 - iii. Opportunities for student involvement
 - iv. Sustainably-oriented work
 - v. Commitment to being non-profit
 - vi. Other: _____
 - b. If you answered "No", why?
 - i. _____
11. The organization is meeting its mission statement.
- a. Select one: 1 (disagree), 2, 3, 4, 5 (agree), Don't know

APPENDIX B: Interviews

Operations Manager, Berkeley Student Food Collective

1. What experience do you have with the BSFC?
2. In what ways has the BSFC grown since you started as OM? In what ways has it failed to grow?
3. Do you think the BSFC is adapting quickly enough to remain a sustainable business?
4. What are the most important qualities / characteristics for someone to be able to do your job?

Co-Manager, ReUSE

1. What experience do you have with ReUSE?
2. In what ways has ReUSE grown since you first started as manager? In what ways has it failed to grow?
3. Do you think the volunteer staff model is sustainable?
4. What are the most important qualities / characteristics for someone to be able to that job?

Vice President, BSC

1. What experience do you have with the BSC?
2. In what ways has the BSC succeeded and failed to grow as an organization?
3. What are the most important qualities / characteristics for someone to be able to your job?
4. Why are so many members un-educated about the work of the Board?