THE NEW PRODUCTIVE PROCESS
FROM THE SELF-MANAGEMENT

Sandra Rufino (PRO-EPUSP)
ssrufino@yahoo.com.br

This article aims to explain the new management work forms - such as democratic and collective management, knowledge and information appropriation, use of machines and equipment as production helpers, and the effects besides the emergence of new economic and social relationships that could derive from these changes. These are the main points for understanding the Solidary Economy process, in which enterprises could combine economic maintenance and social commitment. Multiple and varied solutions are essential to the self-management enterprises, because many times the resources found in the traditional models could be uncertain. For that reason, the solidary economy enterprises show some peculiarities at the organizational, fiscal, juridical, accountantship, patrimonial, etc. areas. These examples could show the strength and the power of self-management enterprises within the new panorama of economical growth in Brazil and in the world.

Keywords: The new productive process from the self-management
1. Introduction

To study, understand, and ponder about Solidary Economy: that’s a challenge that various knowledge areas already focused on. Which changes actually exist? What are the new qualities and complications still in the path of social enterprises? Is there something new and what are the traditional organizations elements? Finally, a possible answer to the question: “what is the solidary economy enterprise”?

The emergence of a new way to manage the economy, on an ethical and solidary basis, counts on a very rich and diversified “prehistory”. The Rochdale pioneers set the foundation to forces that could renew or sometimes create new social and economical practices.

The diversity of experiences and their multiple interpretations demand from the researcher a careful precision on the object in focus. The requirement is that there is interdisciplinarity and similarity in terms of procedures and results.

Within the specific knowledge areas – Production Engineering, for example – this subject becomes a challenge, since it can contribute to meet some needs or potentialize the innovations demanded from these enterprises in operation management. The analysis of these experiences is important to provide a better focus on the Engineering role in the Solidary Economy expansion, since self-management, information democracy, administrative and production management knowledge employed, besides innovation and improvisation, are foundation of social enterprises.

The enterprises analyzed are work co-operatives, with multiple production aspects in different service areas. This article proposes to map the object – the co-operatives – at their daily work activities, from the production management and organization as a differentiated practice, a sui generis phenomenon in the Engineering area. The co-operatives in focus were not uncommon examples, but actual enterprises of workers that planned to keep their incomes and expand their experience, which is entering maturity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding the Solidary Economy

A new economic model that can think about integration forms between capital gains purposes and the solidary and humanistic ethical. An economic model aimed at people’s needs and focused on human development: is the Solidary Economy key line, still in the discovery period, with varied and widespread endeavors. In these accomplishment process, especially in Brazil, there are many and very intense experiences. To ponder about these aspects demands the recovery of many histories, ideas and practices (Pedrini, 2000, Parra, 2002; Singer 2002).

The Solidary Economy asseverates itself throughout local, regional and national policies, besides governments and research institution leading actions (at universities, churches, Non-governmental Organizations, etc.). However, the main articulation comes from the community, which gathers to make practical enterprises in order to guarantee the survival of all the members in the community.

Co-operativism, which originated in Europe, emerges as the most advanced side of Solidary Economy, the longer-lasting and more consistent model. The co-operatives progress, in the world and in Brazil, has covered a long path. Lately, under the globalization effects, the co-operativist enterprises have multiplied and diversified.
Solidarity Economy “is another form of production, with collective property or capital association and individual freedom as fundamental principles” (Singer, 2002, p.10). The modification of the means of production is a target, but the structures of this ownership, the derivative effects of a new production management, the open possibilities in the field of production control and the surplus destination – converted to the social basis – and social, cultural, economical relationships arising from these changes are equally targets.

2.2 Self-Management in Production

The management at the enterprises does not always necessarily follow the same format. Self-management is one of these management systems, consisting in the autonomy of enterprise members’ collective decision about the purposes, processes and results of the work.

In this process, one of the most important factor is the universal access to knowledge and information: the decision-making could be collective. The starting point is the idea of knowledge as a presupposition for democracy and the essence of decision-making (Castilho, 1978; Peixoto, 2000; Pelos, 2000). The construction of a new form of production and management, without repeating traditional models, could only happen if every person involved are informed and understand the productive process and co-operative management.

In the case of solidarity economy enterprises, at the start, only productive workers remain, because it a manager to control and manage the production within the traditional model is superfluous, therefore the workers themselves could accomplish this role. The eminent conflicts between workers and owner no longer exist, since both functions have dissolved into one. The sharing of experiences and information flow available to everyone avoids concentration and promotes the democracy of knowledge (Rufino, 2005).

The essential element for these changes is the transformation of habits, patterns and values, established in the new social, cultural and individual interactions from a group with solidarity feeling and action (Lewin, 2001). The member of a cooperative society acquires a group awareness, taking responsibility. From the moment the practice of self-management starts in the enterprise, members feel valued and capable.

3. Case Studies

Considering the work co-operatives as the best examples of Solidary Economy enterprises, the choice followed these rules:

- The co-operatives should count on a fostering entity;
- The choice for co-operatives acting in the service sector;
- Affinity, proximity, acceptance and availability of the co-operative partner-workers.

The research focused the analysis on the questions related to the productive process dynamics, established in the purposes of this article. The following subjects are chosen as paramount for analyzing the enterprises:

- Work organization and productive process: presents the organizational dynamics;
- Relationship: shows the inter-personal relationships, from individual to collective and from collective to individual;
- Formation: focused on the formal, professional and social education (self-management);
- Knowledge management: presents the information flow, knowledge appropriation and the usage techniques by the collectivity;
- Financial and marketing aspects: approaches the co-operatives financial (wages and costs)
and marketing issues;
  – Technology and innovation: presents the technologies and innovations incorporated to the co-operatives production.

3.1 Cooperafis (Bahia - Brazil)

The Cooperafis – Cooperativa Regional de Artesãs Fibras do Sertão (Regional Co-operative of Fiber Craftswomen) – was established from the common problems discussions by 80 craftswomen in the late 1998, in the capacitating studies in the sisal handicraft accomplished at the Brazilian northeast.

This is the biggest co-operative in that northeastern region. At present, there are up to 100 members of a cooperative society (with ages ranging from 22 and 70) and distributed in 10 production cores. The groups started to acquire specialization in various handicraft techniques, such as continuous bundle sewing, weaving on wheelwork with nail and knitwear on sisal (Agave Sisalana Perrine, Amarilidaceae) and caroa (Neoglaziovia Variegate) fiber to increase the products diversity.

The co-operative has a handicraft production process: each worker manufactures a full product (sisal and caroa handicraft: basketmaking, kitchenware, vases, carpets, bathing gloves, hats, purses, aïós – purse made with caroa fibers –, decorative pieces etc.), performing all steps in the process.

![Figure 1: Sisal Artifacts Macro Process](image)

3.2 CooperExata (Minas Gerais - Brazil)

The CooperExata – Cooperativa Autogestionária dos Trabalhadores de Retífica de Motores Exata (Workers Self-Management Exata Co-operative for Motors Reconditioning) –, formed in 1999, started the activities with the staff of a bankrupted reconditioning shop (one of the most important, at the time).

The equipment and services offered by this reconditioning shop co-operative are one of the five biggest reconditioning shops at the Belo Horizonte metropolitan area (there are 100). The enterprise has nine worker-partners (with ages ranging between 25 and 50), the majority with low education.

The production system is a manufacture to render reconditioning services in the truck engine area. This system demands specialized machines – a factor that propitiates work division, with every person performing a step of the process.
3.3 Cooperativa do Sabor (São Paulo - Brazil)

The Cooperativa do Sabor (Flavor Co-operative) started its activities in the second half of 2000 with the 18 former employees discussions and mobilization. These employees used to work for a restaurant chain in a crisis caused by misadministration, and decided to keep only one restaurant open from the former chain.

At present, the employees group is divided, with some financial problems and fear about new investments to improve the restaurant; the bought goods were transformed into seizure elements in order to pay the former owner debts. Therefore, the co-operative could not expand or make investments, considering the employees’ general insecurity.

The co-operative has drastically reduced the number of members: there are only 9 active members. The relationship and financial problems still persist. To aggravate the situation, the co-operative was judged former enterprise successor, a fact that forces debts payment to the ex-employees.

The productive system is focused on the food area, the goods production and the restaurant/snack bar services. The work division happens in two ways: serving (counter, cash register, general services) and kitchen (all material that demands preparation: food broiled on a grill, salads, hot food).

4. The Emerging Impacts in the Change to the Operation Management with Self-Management

Within an Engineering point of view, Solidary Economy appears as a group of reflected actions (involving techniques and tools) at the production and work organization scope, besides the aspects already analyzed – for example, productive process, organizational culture, ergonomics, involvement, motivation, etc. The challenge, however, is harmonizing these factors with the work model not based on hierarchies, both collective and democratic.

The essential element for democratic management is the equality between every single person within the collective work model. Self-management has a basic assumption: the equality of all the persons involved (in rights as well as in duties), need for autonomy development, with group respectful attitude.
The creation of a new culture or new social model is the ultimate transformation promoted by this equality, because it is a demonstration of the “managed production in common needs expressing the denial of every social exclusion format used so far to suffocate any libertarian and democratic aspiration. [...] It is a culture that accomplishes and acquires by making” (Oliveira, 2001, p.21).

From these notions, it is possible to perceive that solidary culture is structured within new patterns. The elimination of differences between the producer and the manager establishes a new relationship stage in the social enterprises. The member of an enterprise chosen by the described system expresses the search for new values, values without the traditional concepts such as competitive individualism and the priority of profit over work (Singer, 2000).

There are many problems in the transition from the traditional management model to self-management, since the hierarchic management and the usual work models still remain. However, it is necessary to consider that there is not a single administrative and productive model for all social enterprises. So, within these boundaries, it is possible to believe that it is “better to work in a group. When among peers, the worker is stimulated to imitate them, to produce and to work with more satisfaction. Besides, working in a group could foster constructive criticism” (Guilhaume, 1981, p.306).

An important change is the collective knowledge management. This is not concerned only with information and its flows, but with the quality, availability and the range of what is being produced. Therefore, information and knowledge blend and share the same flow. That is a very important way to keep work collective and workers’ interests.

It should be noted that the self-management model does not comprehend the difference between manager and producer. The work realization itself recovers the components unification: planning, execution and management (Corrêa, 2004; Singer, 2000). The alternative management models could create some management tools designed for decision-making (today mostly restrictive and hierarchic) on a collective and participative basis.

Management/production unity, tasks alternation, communication improvement and continuous learning are the most important elements in the self-control working process. From the production rationalization without the traditional management hierarchic procedures, increasing the co-operative cohesion (difficulties and shortage overcoming). The management models used in the enterprises with more workers involved and responsibility (empowerment, teamwork): moving resources that amplify productivity, quality and worker’s satisfaction (Slack, Chambers, Jonhston, 2002). However, all these models had a compulsory nature, with limited autonomy and hierarchic control.

Only the work self-control is not enough to keep competitiveness; the work co-operatives need to improve or to put into practice administrative and production management techniques to be strong as economic enterprises.

The professionalization of the staff and the creation of local coordination could be necessary for some co-operatives, considering the production size, the number of members, the process complexity. This does not mean the restitution of a hierarch work control, typical in the traditional models, but the emergence of a working structure subordinate to the collective, in the technical and political aspects.

This new reality in course could demand new analysis tools, and also new tools to help its development and structuring: new techniques and technologies closer to collective concepts, but keeping individual autonomy. The social situation and technical learning improvement
could allow the workers to adapt to the present technologies or expand the innovation degree without any initial investment.

Knowledge appropriation on the part of workers – improving education and technical learning – is the basis for a better co-operative operation, but with the same focus on the collective management. It is a process that implies creativity and flexibility increase, since the social enterprises could share the knowledge with other members.

Shared knowledge transforms itself within the self-management environment, with collective recreation and re-elaboration. This process indicates a transformative skill to transform knowledge into collective valuable results.

However, the co-operative management insufficiencies still remain. For the management and productive organization appropriation, learning and transformation to occur, solidarity economy enterprises could enlarge and amplify learning and get qualified in management and productive techniques.

5. Conclusion

As a final appreciation, in order to render a full solidarity economy transformations frame, it is necessary to consider the multiple interference aspects in productive process issues. The search for a new culture (not only productive and economic), with more equality and social justice, is an attempt to make the projects take their way and overcome all problems and challenges of the capitalist system, establishing new points for overcoming and transformation.

In these context, the Solidary Economy experiences establish themselves as a landmark, a new format to rethink and provide dynamism to the new process and alternatives for a better world-wide social and economic development.

REFERENCES


