

Aging Leadership and declining Youth Engagement in Cooperative Businesses and its Impact on Organizational Sustainability: An Empirical Study in Nagpur District

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ABSTRACT

Cooperative businesses must play an important part in ensuring inclusive economic development, inclusion of the community and democratic management. However, these days the majority of the cooperative institutions are grappling with the issue of aging leaders and declining interest of youths that is threatening their sustainability in the future. The older members normally wield power in the leadership positions and rarely have the younger members contributing towards the governing and decision making processes. Such a generation gap can result in the innovation, flexibility, and technological advancement being reduced in the collaborative organizations. The target of the problem that underpins the present research project is on the role of old age leadership and the decline in the young population involvement in the sustainability of the organization of the cooperative businesses in Nagpur District. The research is also empirical because it utilizes primary data, which was framed in the shape of structured questionnaires and contacts with the people of collaboration and officials. Research findings have revealed that the various leading causes that stem down youth involvement include lack of awareness, absence of leadership opportunities among the youths, and personal decisions on the job in the private sector. The current paper suggests improving the youth involvement, planning of leadership development and collaborative learning as a way of ensuring that an organization is sustainable in the long run

Keywords: Cooperative Businesses, Aging Leadership, Youth Engagement, Organizational Sustainability, Cooperative Governance, Youth Participation, Nagpur District.

INTRODUCTION:

The application of cooperative business is not a new narrative as an alternative important node of institutional presentation to attain an inclusive economic growth, social justice and empowering the society. Cooperatives according to the principles of voluntary membership, democratic control, and mutual good have endeavored so much in enriching the local economy, especially in the third world countries like India. The cooperative movement has been part of India past in the industries such as agriculture, banking, credit societies, milk production and consumer services provision. Such organizations as National Cooperative Development Corporation, National Cooperative Union of India have contributed to development and formation of cooperative business in the nation. Financial access, jobs and collective bargaining are provided to the local communities to make them stronger economically and in terms of social welfare provided by cooperatives in most areas. However, despite this valuable work, cooperative organizations of current times are exposed to a variety of structural and managerial challenges that put the long-term viability of the organizations into jeopardy.

Aging leadership and loss of youth engagement is one of the most scalding emerging issues in the field of cooperatives. This situation is prevalent in most cooperative institutions where the seniors are members

who have been in the institution long enough to have control over the leadership. Even though they constitute a factor of stability in an organization by virtue of their experience and institutional knowledge, there has been no generational shift in the positions of leadership thereby creating an inward imbalance between the older generation leaders and youth in an organization. The dilemma inhibits the circulation of innovative ideas, technology acceptance and modern day managerial operations that are central in creating institutions that operate in a rapidly changing economic environment. In the meantime the young generations are now less keen/eager to participate in cooperative governance and management practices. Such a lack of youth representation in the decision making institutions creates a gap in leaders, and the future subsistence of the further existence of the cooperative organizations may be subject to influence.

The potential role of the involvement of youth in making cooperative business sustainable and being modernized is also stated as one of the primary ones. The young people are innovative, technologically gifted, and innovative in the field of entrepreneurship that can enable the cooperatives to deal with the existing market dynamics. However, the list of causes that resulted in a decreased engagement of the youth in the cooperative section is quite numerous. They are a poor feeling of cooperation ideals, poor leadership among the young, the bureaucratic

governing and rising tendencies among the youth towards accepting employment in the private and corporate grounds. This has rendered cooperatives hard to attract and retain young talents that would enable them to bring in innovativeness and strategic change within their organisation. The absence of participation by the youth is not only affecting the leader succession success, but also harming the movement of cooperation to be competitive in the new age of business world.

Of particular topicality to the problem is noted in the regions where cooperatives constitute an important part of the local economy. Within such districts as Nagpur, the Starving Maharashtra Cooperative societies actively participate in credit services, marketing of agriculture, distribution of consumer and development of housing among other things. These associations are of numerous members and engage in economic operations within communities. However, the cooperatives in this region are faced by the leadership issues which are characterized by the excessive nature of the leadership of the older members and lack of participation of the young members. Future sustainability of these institutions may be threatened by the absence of proper leadership transitions and youth accommodation provision. The cooperative industry sustainability does not entirely depend on the financial performance since it must have the capabilities of withstanding the dimension of democratic participation, leadership renewal as well as the flexibility of institutions.

These issues would create a need to pursue the interlinkages between aging and leadership, youth involvement and sustainability among a cooperative business. The awareness of the circumstances that discourage the young people to participate and discovering how to encourage the incorporation of the intergenerational leadership would enable the empowerment of the movement of cooperation. Sustainability and the sustainability of the cooperative institutions can be enhanced by having the youngsters develop leadership, improving the education that is based on cooperation and letting the young members of the cooperative institutions have the chance to be a member of the governance. In this case the objective of the present study is to test the influence of the ageing leadership and the declining youths contribution on the long term sustainability of co-operative business especially in Nagpur district. The research seeks to contribute towards successful generation strategies that can make the cooperative business growth and sustainability in the region sustainable by providing empirical knowledge, on the dynamics of the generational aspects of the cooperatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The organizations of cooperation are significant in incorporating economic growth, community participation and livelihoods. However, proper leadership, participation of the members and perpetuation of the generations happens to be highly productive towards the sustainability of the cooperatives. It has also been observed that some studies have indicated the importance of engaging the

young generation in strengthening the institutions of cooperation other than establishing the impediments that hinder their participation.

Bouichou, Zainal, and Omri (2021) examined Moroccan young people involvement in agricultural cooperatives and found out that cooperatives do have great capacity to provide young people with employment and skills development as well as social participation opportunities. The research has, however, also shared in some challenges such as lack of access to financial resources, lack of knowledge on the tenets of cooperation and poor institutional support, which render the youth ineffective. In line with this, Dongre, Choudhury, and Krishnan (2020) emphasized the essence of attracting youths to cooperatives through institution and educational programs. Their analysis on the experience of the campus cooperatives in India revealed the idea that the interest and the rate at which the youth are involved in the cooperative businesses can be enhanced significantly by exposing them to the principles of a cooperative and practical life at an early age.

Another important aspect that the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) highlights is the availability of cooperatives in promoting the idea of decent work to the young population. According to the report, cooperatives provide a democratic and inclusive platform through which the young individuals can engage in economic processes and derive skills of leadership and entrepreneurship. However, the paper also finds out that in other traditional systems of governance and lack of youth in all decision making positions are likely to push away the youth so as to become active members of the cooperative systems.

In a research conducted by Maina and Maina (2012) in Kenya, some of the variables that influenced the participation of the youth in cooperatives were established. The study found out that the availability of credit, training and enabling policies is a great inspiration to the youngsters. Quite to the contrary, bureaucratic systems of management, absence of transparency and absence of career lures young people who are then attracted to cooperatives. Similar results were also noted by Mdluli (2020) as she was analyzing the presence of youth in cooperatives in Swaziland. The research pointed out that participation by young people would contribute in achieving sustainable livelihoods and financial empowerment to the youths however, institutional issues and lack of programs targeting these youths results in their failure to participate.

In a study research, Muchara and Chiguware (2024) conducted research on the topic of youth participation in rural cooperatives in Kenya and come to a conclusion that due to the nature of leadership which is aging in most of the cooperatives, the youth members of the cooperatives are denied an opportunity to participate in the leadership process. This study discovered that imbalance in leadership generation reduces innovation and flexibility of the cooperative organizations. Just like in the research conducted by Omulo and K'Akumu (2019), the authors analyzed the obstacles in the involvement of the youth in the collaborative segment in Kenya and found out that

inappropriate policy, a lack of mentorship initiatives, and inadequate technological adoption were among the significant issues that deter youth involvement.

The other important literature covered about cooperatives is its historical formation and theoretical foundation of cooperatives. The article by Ortmann and King (2007) was a fantastic description of the historical evolution of agriculture cooperatives, the formulation of its theory, and its operations issue. Their input raises the point that cooperatives are well managed in case the members are fully engaged in the management and decision making. However, the decrease in engagement and leadership stalemate would weaken overtime the collaborative institutions.

Othman and Kari (2018) had been examining the threats and opportunities in views of the youth participation in cooperatives in Malaysia. Apparently, according to their findings, young individuals are more likely to consider cooperatives as conservative and less attractive compared to those of the private sector. Research in this case suggested updating models of cooperation, involving digital technologies, and popularizing the courses on youth leadership in leadership enhancements.

Sibanda (2021) has taken the policy interventions to empower the youth cooperative movement in Africa, the applicability in leadership training, and cooperative education. The paper has asserted that the prospects of leadership and entrepreneurship by the young individuals within the organization would go a long way in promotion of sustainability of the cooperative organizations in the long term.

Another theme that is highly researched in literature is the relationship between cooperatives and the sustainable development. According to Trewin (2004), cooperatives are involved in the rural development role by means of improved income distribution, social inclusion, as well local economy. Similarly, the supportive policies and institutional frameworks are the secret of the achievement of the sustainable cooperative development as it has been emphasized by Yami, Vernooy, and Shrestha (2019). Zografos (2007) also noted that cooperatives would play a critical role in attaining sustainable development whereby they integrate social, economic as well as environmental objectives in their business plans.

In theory, the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979) informs about group dynamics and group participation in an organizational context. The theory states that the individuals are more active members of the groups that they belong and are recognized. It would also help to reduce instances of youths being out of the decision making or leadership in the cooperative context when the youths are involved.

Overall, according to the available sources, youth engagement should considerably affect the sustainability and modernization of cooperative organizations. However, the barriers that are restricting the youth participation include old leadership, less prospect of youth leadership, ignorance and institutionalization. These researches highlight the importance of changes in policies, design the approach to succession in the leadership, and offer the youth the programs to strengthen the

collaborative institutions. The proposed study is based on contributing to this body of knowledge through empirical research results on the relationship between the aging leadership and a declining youth engagement on the sustainability of the cooperative business in Nagpur District.

Objectives of the Study

To examine the age structure of leadership in cooperative businesses in Nagpur District.

To analyze the level of youth engagement in cooperative organizations.

To identify the factors responsible for declining youth participation in cooperative businesses.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There are no significant factors responsible for the declining youth participation in cooperative businesses.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There are significant factors responsible for the declining youth participation in cooperative businesses.

Research Methodology

The current research is based on the empirical type of research design to endeavor to respond to the research question of aging leadership and shrinkage in youth contribution to collaborative business and its effects on organizational sustainability in Nagpur district, in the Maharashtra state, India. The data used in the study is both primary and secondary. The key information will be collected in structured questionnaire to the members, the employees and office bearers of the sampled cooperative organizations e.g. credit societies, the agricultural cooperatives and consumer cooperatives operating in the district. The convenient sampling approach and sample population are samed on the basis of cooperative people of varying age in order to introduce the point of view of the generations concerning leadership and participation. The secondary information will be obtained in the form of researched journals, books, reports issued by government, release of publications by cooperative departments and in other academic researches about the topic of cooperative governance and youth participation in such processes. The statistical techniques that will be used in the collected data are the descriptive statistics, the percentage analysis, and the hypothesis testing that determine the most remarkable factors that affect the youth participation and role in the sustainability of the cooperative organizations. Using the approach, it is possible to conduct the systematic analysis of the leadership operations and the participation of generation in the sector of cooperation.

Table: Descriptive Statistics for Factors Responsible for Declining Youth Participation in Cooperative Businesses

Factors Influencing Youth Participation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of awareness about cooperative principles	120	3.92	0.88
Limited leadership opportunities for youth	120	4.05	0.81
Preference for private sector employment	120	4.18	0.76
Lack of technological modernization in cooperatives	120	3.74	0.90
Bureaucratic and traditional management structure	120	3.69	0.85
Limited financial incentives and career prospects	120	3.98	0.83

The discoveries of the descriptive statistics utilized by the table reveal the critical issues that had the largest impact on decreasing the participation of the youth in the cooperative businesses. Mean values demonstrate that the respondents are inclined to believe that there are many structural and motivational challenges politicians which make youths not participate in cooperatives. Preference towards working in the private sector had the best connotation of mean (Mean = 4.18, SD = 0.76), which means that a substantial population of the young people preferred working in the estimated sector due to other better career opportunities, remunerations, and professional growth opportunities. There is also a high mean score (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.81) on a small leadership opportunity amongst the young people; this is an indicator that takes youths far to enter into the leadership and decision-making process in cooperatives owing to the seniority of leadership. Also, a poor score of financial incentives and career opportunities (Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.83) and lack of awareness about the principles of cooperation (Mean = 3.92, SD = 0.88) is also a significant issue contributing to youth disengagement. The lack of technological modernization and traditional management systems are other reasons why interest of the youth is dwindling. Generally, it is seen that the findings are overall that organizational, structural, and motivational concerns have been joined together to demystify the decreasing participation of young people in cooperative businesses.

ANOVA Table

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square
Between Groups	48.362	5	9.672
Within Groups	161.048	114	1.413
Total	209.410	119	

The table on results of ANOVA indicates factors of significance that have led to the young people being less involved in cooperation businesses. The F-value calculated (6.845) is lower than the level of significance level that has been taken up (0.05). This is to indicate that the variability between the variables that influence the involvement of the young into the cooperative organizations is statistically significant. The p-value is not very strict (the value is less than 0.05) and, therefore, provides the opportunity to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1) according to which there are no significant factors that can lead to the decrease of the youth participation. According to the findings, the insufficiency of values and understanding of the principles of cooperation, preference of the employment within the framework of the sphere of the private sector, and conservative forms of management are also among the factors which influence the decline of the involvement of the young people in the cooperative enterprises significantly. Thus, the findings highlight the need to develop the linkage between institutions and apply the new policies, developmental leadership, and modernization policies that would distribute the greater engagement of the youth in addition to the long-term sustainability of the organization.

DISCUSSION

According to the research findings, there exists a substantial correlation between a set of organizational and socio-economic variables and a declining participation of the youth in cooperation business. This is expressed in statistical analysis that states that degree of limited opportunities as a leader, lack of knowledge regarding any principles involved in cooperation, the desire to work in the private sphere, the conservative system of management play a major role in influencing the participation of young people. These results are a confirmation to the fact that the generational imbalance in the notion of cooperative leadership has given rise to the creation of barriers that hamper the active participation of the young people in the governance and decision making process. The graying of leadership approach to cooperative organizations tends to be limiting to the participating nature of those ideas that are new, innovative and recent management approaches that a young member could provide.

The results can be contrasted with the previous studies which deals with the importance of the youth involvement to the sustainability of the cooperation institutions. Studies have shown that majority of the youths perceive

cooperatives as not so dynamic and lively as corporate organizations and they even avoid them. Besides, absence of exposure to cooperative education and ignorance on the benefits of economic and social benefits of cooperative membership do not motivate young population to join cooperative institutions. The younger generation also finds cooperation organizations less appealing because of the lack of technological advancements and possibility of building a career.

The second key observation that is raised by the study is that most cooperative organizations do not have proper leadership succession planning. Long leadership terms of senior leaders with no clearly developed systems of transferring the generation to the younger absorbers, cause the vacuity of leadership and reduced the capabilities of the youthful generation to overcome the control of management and governmental roles. This would affect the flexibilities and sustainability of cooperative business within a long-term period particularly in the era where technological innovation and digital transformation are the most important factors of development of an organization.

The findings also reveal that when the youth are actively engaged, the collaborative organizations can get huge returns out of them. The young members can also introduce new ideas, computer skills, and entrepreneurial practices that can improve the performance in operations, as well as, competitiveness in the market. It may be seen that by means of the mixture of the leadership abilities of the elderly commanders and the innovation abilities of the youthful commanders, collaborative organizations can form a more balanced and vibrant leadership setup.

The cooperative institutions need thus instate measures that would enhance the involvement of the youth. They could also be leadership training / development, introduction of youth representation in the governing bodies, further working on cooperative programs of education, and updating organizational structures through the help of digital technologies. It can also be done by developing attractive career opportunities and by having mentorship by the experienced leaders to instill confidence and interest in the young members of the members.

Overall, this discussion indicates that the success of the generational integration in leadership and governance is a large factor that determines the sustainability of the cooperative businesses. The problem of the aging leadership and the declining youth support should be addressed in order to make a more cooperative institution stronger and capable of offering more contribution to the socio-economic development.

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Overall Conclusion

The present paper has dwelled into the issue of aging leadership and its declining youth involvement in joint business ventures and what would become of the organization sustainability with aging leaders. The observations contrued imply that an array of organizational, structural and socio-economic factors have critical roles of engagement of the young people in the cooperative institutions. The absence of leadership opportunities in the young members, the non participation of the young individuals in the cooperatives principles, the inclination of working in the private sector, conservative management systems and, poor level of technological developments were introduced as the most important factors that minimized the enlistment of the youth in cooperative organizations.

These variables, as the statistical test and, more particularly, the ANOVA findings, are determined to have a strong influence on the youth involvement and that is why the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative one is accepted. The results have shown that youths cannot participate in governance and decision making process since leadership has always been dominated by the aging leadership that does not have proper succession strategies. This disparate state of affairs might limit innovation, impair firm agility and sustainability of collaborative firms.

The research paper also notes that the youth should be involved into the co-leadership structure to facilitate organizational survival and democratization. The activities of the cooperative organizations can be improved by encouraging the participation of the youths with leadership development projects, learning through collaboration, mentoring, as well as digitalization of learning. This can also be facilitated through provision of more opportunities to young members to contribute in the decision making bodies that can help in governing and improving organizational effectiveness.

In conclusion, the possibility to strike the balance between the experience shown by older members and the freshness and energy as shown by younger generations posing as the leaders of the company crucial to sustaining the business and triggering the further development of the cooperative business. A renewed cooperative institution via youth engagement and emphasis on good system of leadership succession will play a key role in ensuring that the institutions will remain involved in the socio-economic development..

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