

COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT IN A COOPERATIVE:  
PROBLEMATIZING PRODUCTIVITY AND POWER

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Since the mid-twentieth century, the structure of the workplace has undergone a transformation. While the conventional firm with its rigid bureaucracies is still in use, many businesses have grown increasingly flexible, flat, and polycentric: “empowerment” and “innovation” are the coin of the realm. As the way we work changed, professional communication scholarship pivoted to consider communication practices in these structures.

While professional communication scholars have long discussed these kinds of organizations, they have not discussed an increasingly popular alternative: cooperatives. Owned and operated by the people who use them, these organizations can significantly affect the communities in which they operate. To contribute to the rhetorical knowledge of cooperatives, I conducted a qualitative study at the Riverwest Public House Cooperative (“Public House”). This project extends research of flat organizations by investigating a cooperative business. I draw my research questions from the concerns scholars identified in other kinds of organizations: namely, the role of genres in configuring power and facilitating organizational change (Clark 2006; Devitt 1991; Spinuzzi 2007; Star 1991; Winsor 2003; Zachry 2000).

1. How does a cooperative employ genres differently?
2. What do these texts tell us about how power is distributed in a cooperative?
3. How do the genres it employs affect organizational change?

These questions helped me better understand the connections between negotiations of power and texts at work in this particular business, leading me to several findings:

1. **Genres.** Collaboratively produced texts are the backbone of consensus-based decision-making. Unlike conventional organizations, in a cooperative, many (though not all) stakeholders are given access to governance. For instance, documents like an incident report or safer space policy have greater social significance when they are not only produced by agreement but also *enforced* through agreement.
2. **Organizational Change.** The Public House underwent a managerial overhaul during my study. Like conventional businesses, change occurred through a confluence of material circumstances and individual and organizational goals; however, due to the absence of formal structure, in this instance, a broader range of individuals was able to institute structural change.
3. **Distribution of Power.** In place of hierarchy, rhetorics of empowerment and democracy were deployed horizontally to task employees with managerial duties without financial rewards.

For this project, I provide an interdisciplinary take on hierarchy and organizational structure by examining one cooperative, still in its infancy, through the lens of genre and power in the workplace.

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# **Chapter 1: Cooperatives, Collective Management, and Hierarchy:**

## **Rationale and Relevance for Study**

**Vignette 1:** Jamal has worked for two years as the lead bartender for the Workers' Collective, the committee of workers who democratically manage the bar. After starting school, he finds he is overwhelmed and decides to step down. The bar operates fine without a lead bartender for a few months, but soon maintenance tasks start to fall through the cracks, scheduling gaps occur, and inventory and finance officers operate without input from the group. The Board of Directors gives the Workers' Collective a deadline to decide how they will manage themselves. At the next workers' meeting, the Collective revisits the job description of the lead bartender, paring down the description to fit the bar's current needs, and then makes changes in Google Docs. They agree one person could perform the tasks—most of what was previously performed by Jamal. The workers decide to revisit the decisions they have made in two weeks, then three months, and then one year. Finally, one worker nominates another for the position. After it is seconded, a vote is taken. The nominee is brought back into the room and congratulated on her new position as lead bartender.

**Vignette 2:** After a year in the same position, Liz believes she deserves a raise. After consulting with co-workers, she pitches her own wage hike at a policy session of the Workers' Collective. In the meeting, Liz begins by drawing attention to the shared ethic of fair wages and valued labor, reminding the group that her experience should bring higher pay. She points out her dedication and dependability, closing her case by suggesting she take on additional duties. After discussion, the group votes in favor of the wage hike for the position in general and a raise specific for Liz, with the addition of the extra duties she suggested.

## Introduction

With over 3,000 members and a hundred active volunteers, the Riverwest Co-op and Café has operated in the Riverwest neighborhood of Milwaukee, Wisconsin for 13 years, relying almost completely on volunteer labor ([riverwestcoop.org/about/history](http://riverwestcoop.org/about/history)). Volunteers stock products, run the register, clean, and complete many necessary tasks around the grocery store. In return, volunteers receive a free meal in the café and a discount in the grocery store. Each year, hundreds of volunteers flood the cooperative to help with completing inventory.

In the same neighborhood, participants in the Riverwest24 ([riverwest24.com](http://riverwest24.com)), a leaderless, cooperatively organized annual bicycle race, complete a five-mile loop between houses and businesses on busy city streets. It is completely volunteer run, from organizing volunteers and event details, designing the website, tracking laps and checkpoints both digitally and manually, cooking and washing dishes (no paper plates or plastic ware!) for nearly a thousand people, and cleaning up the city blocks after the race. If organizations like these examples operate cooperatively, does it change the nature of their work? How does a neighborhood cooperative come into existence in the first place and what can we learn about the way they write their documentation together, work together, and solve problems together?

Evident in these stories, cooperatives can fundamentally drive a local economy.<sup>1</sup> What the above observations demonstrate is cooperation and collaboration as “business.” Each of these success stories of cooperation functions by collective management: management by a group of workers or volunteers, rather than a general manager. I argue this success may problematize what we think we know about organizational structure and the role of hierarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> A cooperative is an ownership model. A collective is a management model.

In the past, professional communication scholarship often assumed an organization marked by hierarchy and bureaucracy; however, as new technologies have changed the way we work, scholarship has shifted toward investigating flatter, more autonomous work in the form of teams or networked organizations. Scholars like Spinuzzi, Clark, and Winsor have found correlations and dissimilarities between the models in the way power and communication works, arguing power and relationships extend beyond the top-down structure (Spinuzzi 2007, 2014; Winsor 2001; Zachry 2000; Zuboff 1988). In doing so, scholars have identified that even within an apparently hierarchical structure, communication and power are more omnidirectional than they may appear at first (Winsor 2003). In their research, they have unveiled the many means by which horizontal organizations may enact subordinating configurations of power through management mechanisms (Clark 2006; Longo 2000; Spinuzzi 2007; Sussman, Adams, Kuzmits, and Raho 2002; Winsor 1996, 2003; Zuboff 2006). Scholarship suggests flat organizations may enact power differently, in large part through genres, and may fall short of actualizing goals of workplace autonomy.

Researchers have studied the flow of information through an organization as it is channeled to affirm and reinforce the extant power structure of the superior-subordinate relationship (Fragale, Sumanth, Tiedens, and Northcraft 2012; Longo 2000; Sussman et al. 2002; Winsor 1996, 2003). For example, in *Spurious Coin*, Longo deploys Foucauldian concepts of discipline and panoptic oversight as a point of inquiry for a top-down structure, arguing hierarchal management ensures—and relies on—subordinate discipline and an internalization of rules (2000). Relying on the same work by Foucault in *Writing Power*, Winsor analyzes the role of genres in shaping and maintaining these structures of control, noting genres play a major role in defining a hierarchy within an organization (1996, 2003). Similarly, Zachry's historical

examination of genres rests on a history of downward communication (2000). For instance, he points out stable genres developed at the Rath Packing Plant exert control; peoples' work activities, identities, and positions within the company were dictated in part by genres supporting a bureaucratic hierarchy (65, 66, 68). Clark extends Bourdieu's notion of capital to analyze narratives of empowerment and the regulation of hierarchies, observing these narratives are too often about employee bribes for doing more work with little reward, financial or otherwise (2006).

While these scholars carefully examine configurations of power in an organization, many take the presence of a hierarchy for granted. Tim Kastelle, professor of innovation at the University of Queensland Business School, recently wrote that among organization and business researchers, there is an underlying assumption that a hierarchy is necessary, and, therefore, many businesses and university business programs teach with the following assumptions.

- You need a hierarchy to succeed.
- The people who do the work are of lower status than those who decide what work to do.
- Organizations that do not follow the norms are likely to fail (Kastelle 2013; see also Rinehart 2006).

Furthermore, Kastelle identified challenges to making the case for the need for non-hierarchical businesses.

- Many people do not believe in democracy in the workplace.
- Even if you do believe in democracy, it can be hard to imagine work without hierarchy.
- People fear the unusual.
- It is hard to change organizational structures (Kastelle 2013).

Despite the fact that many still believe hierarchy is important, and alongside the current trends

toward polycentric, flat businesses, for the past two centuries, cooperatives have challenged this unequal distribution of power and are currently experiencing a significant boom, supported by local and federal governments, university researchers, and urban and rural development programs (Dewan 2014; Restakis 2010). I aim to extend professional communication research of flat, flexible organizations by including cooperatives. I believe it is important to do so because cooperatives can provide a clear contrast between organizations that claim autonomy and empowerment while structurally maintaining hierarchy, and those who try to enact it.

## **Conventional Business**

*Hard pressed to envision any realistic alternative, most people accepted these rules and the hierarchical distinctions they entailed. In this way managers and workers, fitfully, kept the faith.*

-Shoshana Zuboff

While Winsor, Spinuzzi, Zachry, Clark, and others have done much to unveil the complexities and contradictions in hierarchical, command-and-control organizations and to respond to the shifting nature of work, collective management that is deliberately democratic has yet to be substantially studied by professional communication. Nevertheless, this research is valuable because, at least in part, this type of organization responds to the failures and criticisms against conventional firms. This section provides an interdisciplinary literary review of hierarchy in business management and points out important contrasts to a cooperative.

Fragle et al. begin their study of structure and communication with this useful definition of hierarchy:

Hierarchy—the unequal distribution of status and power among individuals in a collective—is a defining feature of organizations (Pfeffer 1992; Leavitt 2005; Mannix and Sauer 2006; Magee and Galinsky 2008; Gruenfeld and Tiedens 2010). Individuals’ desires to gain status and power through hierarchical advancement are often characterized as fundamental human motives (Winter 1973; McClelland 1975). In any given group hierarchy, individuals generally wish to move toward the top, where the greatest power and status reside. (Fragle et al. 373)

Echoing Kastle’s claims of its ubiquity, Fragle et al. position hierarchy as a fundamental feature of organizations, and the desire to move up the hierarchy as a fundamental human desire.

Taylorism has become the reigning metaphor for bureaucracy and command-and-control, the rationalization of work through scientific study and management. Its philosophy is inextricable from today’s version of post-industrial capitalism and modern management strategies (Murphy 2011; Rinehart 2006). Kastle, Zuboff, and others have pointed out hierarchy remains deeply ingrained in the way we think about doing business, bolstered in part by its entrenchment in the curriculum of business schools (Kastle 2013; Clark 156; Zuboff 233). Taylor arguably made a lasting contribution to American management in the measurement and rationalization of work in two meaningful ways: first, by breaking labor into smaller tasks; secondly, by extracting and displacing the knowledge of the labor process from the employee to the supervisor, decoupling idiosyncratic know-how from the laborer. In this way, conventional businesses are easily recognizable by asymmetrical bureaucracy based fundamentally on the concepts of ownership (Zuboff 225).

Importantly, rationalization is one of the lasting impacts of Taylorism in American management. Zuboff writes rationalization “was transformative upon American managers and their claims to authority. They learned... that the interior of the labor process had to be penetrated, explicated, and rationalized” (230). Rationalization of labor relies on the panoptic gaze of the manager upon the managed. This shift from workers owning their work habits and managing their labor, to management owning the labor and, during the time of employment, the laborer, is the root of Taylorist power (Zuboff 1996; Rinehart 2006).

This top-down structure is one of the most fundamental differences between conventional and collective management; namely, mechanisms were designed to exact the most from an employee in the most efficient way for the maximum profits to the investors/owners and maximum benefit for the worker (Drucker 1987; Longo 2000; Rinehart 2006; Zuboff 1988). Taylor himself describes the design as focused solely on mutual prosperity.

The principle object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee... maximum prosperity for each employee means not only higher wages than are usually received by men of his class, but of more importance still, it also means the development of each man to his state of maximum efficiency...(10-11)

The scientific management system methodically rationalized labor, seeking to maximize profit and efficiency to benefit both the employee and employer (Drucker 1988; Longo 2000; Taylor 1911). Unlike cooperatives, which define themselves as balancing between profit and community development, Taylorism and approaches like it emphasize profit as the primary motivation for the worker, manager, and investor. Taylor’s scientific management “provides the ultimate rationale for managerial authority” (Zuboff 230).

## Surveillance and Control

Rationalization of labor depends in part on observation and surveillance (i.e., the manager's gaze). Longo deploys the Foucauldian concept of panoptic oversight and discipline as a point of inquiry for the conventional firm. Like Zuboff, Longo argues hierarchal management ensures subordinate discipline and an internalization of rules, and that hierarchical management is rooted in regulating labor (2000). Like Drucker and others, Longo links the beginnings of management as a control system like Taylorism with the rise of scientism and engineering. Due to the evolution of engineering in large, complex organizations, engineers were tasked with designing social systems along with the mechanical systems of production and operation.

These designs for social control were termed, 'management systems'...As engineers designed management systems to make workers as efficient as the machines with which they worked, they also designed intricate technical communication systems as the mechanisms for effecting operations control for maximum efficiency. (79)

These systems of control and discipline “worked to make an organization’s production more efficient by measuring each worker’s performance and comparing it to pre-established performance and quality standards,” standards developed by Taylorists (Longo 79; Rinehart 2006; Taylor 1911; Zuboff 1988). Longo and Winsor have both pointed out that the ongoing examination for and correction of deviance from standards, the soul of American management, is a Foucauldian “normalizing gaze” (Longo 80; Winsor *Writing Power* 7). This oversight strips workers of previously held idiosyncratic judgments and decision-making power on how work should be done, how intensely they work and when, and how to manage their time. In a sense, Taylorism is a response to previously held autonomous power by the laborers and an attempt to

seize control of worker's labor from the worker to the overseer.

Rinehart identifies Marxist ideas of alienation and worker discontent as reactionary to these systems of command and control (12). In a nod to worker management in the past, Longo, Rinehart, and Zuboff draw a stark contrast from the standardization, control, and fragmentation of workers from each other into disparate parts of a machine, against the previous guild-type of management structure. Longo writes:

This type of measuring and comparing viewed workers as individual units of production, not as members of collectives such as crews, gangs, or guilds as they were formally conceptualized... This function of measuring and comparing individual performance against standards for production and quality allowed systematized management to operate through constant examination of machines and workers. (79; See also Foucault 1975; Zuboff 1988)

Winsor found similar viewpoints of worker-as-machine, pointing out how technicians were viewed as mechanisms, designed to work as efficiently as possible (2007).

Panoptic oversight at the core of hierarchal management facilitates “the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of work within in the systematically managed operation,” stripping away shop workers’ decision-making power; Longo writes, “written operation standards dictated in detail the most efficient ways to do their work” (Longo 80, 198). Rinehart also references the stripping of idiosyncratic judgments as key to managing and controlling the labor process and, consequently, the laborer.

Just as workers must give up their capacity to control the product of their toil, they also cede their ability to determine the intensity and duration of work; to define the manner in which work is organized, divided and allocated; and to

determine the tools and machines used in the production process. Furthermore, it is the employer who decides whether or not work will be performed at all. (12)

Dissimilarly, a worker cooperative or collective emphasizes the value of labor and the self-interest of the laborer contrasts sharply with a workers' lack of autonomy (Polletta 183).

Rinehart and others argue the current worker cooperative style of management we have owes its existence to a reaction against dehumanization and bureaucracy, the search and elimination of any deviance from efficiency standards (Rinehart 2006; Williams 2007).

Workers have been encouraged to surveil each other since the emergence of scientific management (Billeaux et al. 2011; Rosenthal 2013; Longo 2000; Zuboff 1988). In fact, mutual policing is essential to management, the key factor that separates management from the shop, the field, or the sales floor. For workers to report on each other, they must first see themselves as unassociated with one another, and then must have “internalized the control system and its standards for behavior before they can be motivated to report abnormal behaviors on the part of other workers” (81). This progressive fragmentation of labor and individualization of workers functions not only to micromanage tasks but also to divide and conquer, a strategy designed to encourage workers to see themselves as isolated individuals who were rewarded or punished apart from one another (Longo 81, 128).

One mechanism of panoptic oversight ensuring internalization of the rules is the affinity between the worker and the manager, whereas the worker can now take place in her own regulation. Though there was some resistance by labor unions and other labor organizing efforts (Longo 2000; Rinehart 2006; Zuboff 1988), Longo argues workers were further divided from each other by efforts to “transcend the hierarchal control” and, ultimately, to report on each other. Fortified by the religion of the American dream of success and consumerism (Murphy

2011; Williams 2007; Zuboff 1988), by the religious piety of the protestant work ethic (Zuboff 1988), and by the religion of authority (Zuboff 1988; Arendt 1961), workers participated in their own regulation.

Hierarchical management depends in part on what Arendt calls the spiritual dimension of power, together rendering constant external surveillance unnecessary “in the smoothly running panoptic system” (Arendt 1961; Longo 81). Longo, Zuboff, and Rinehart argue the protestant work ethic undergirds the notion of hierarchy as obedience to “God’s natural law.” Protestant asceticism contributed to religious and social notions of hierarchy as “God’s natural order” (Zuboff 225). Eventually a reliance on “God’s law” was replaced with concepts of ownership, hard work, and entrepreneurship (Longo 2000; Rinehart 2006; Zuboff 1988). According to Zuboff, the emerging belief became that due to his hard work, the entrepreneur was rewarded by the system with success, “achieving grace,” and, most importantly, this success was available to anyone willing to exert the right amount of disciplined effort (226).

The promise of “grace” in the form of upward mobility and increased capital maximized consent of the workers. Zuboff writes, “These currents of feudal piety, Lockean individualism, Social Darwinism, and economic pragmatism animate U.S. labor law even as they inform the daily experiences of managers and workers” (Zuboff 238). Panoptic discipline—penetrating the minutia of labor—and other mechanisms of control are lynchpins of this form of hierarchical management. Longo, Rinehart, and Zuboff demonstrate when workers complained that this system was dehumanizing, managers often argued that this system of control was “natural,” and an inevitable relationship,” appealing to natural law (Longo 2000; Zuboff 1988; Arendt 1961). Drawing from Weber, Locke, Smith, and Arendt, Zuboff describes the connection between obedience, control, and hierarchy as fundamentally and historically infused with spiritual values

as a way of ensuring obedience.

Since authority presupposes the unity of command and obedience, the use of coercive power implies that, to some degree, authority has failed. Similarly, authority can be defined in contradistinction to persuasion and dialogue, since obedience to authority is achieved through a belief in the hierarchical order that creates the mutuality of command and obedience. Legitimate authority need not depend on violence or reasoned argument to elicit the desired action. (221)

Like Arendt, Zuboff contends authority is the “spiritual dimension of power” that depends on faith in a meaning system that “decrees the necessity of the hierarchical order,” (222) and requires “the collective participation in a system of meaning that goes beyond the immediate context, those who command or obey, and reaches into the domain of transcendent values...” (222). The “meaning” of the system comes to resemble a natural order; Zuboff writes, “The hierarchical order is meaningful and acceptable as long as people believe that such ranking rules reflect a higher order of moral necessity” (222). Echoing Kastle’s claims, Zuboff challenges the seemingly innocuous, natural role hierarchy plays in our workplaces.

### **Genre of Control**

While Zuboff challenges the naturalizing of hierarchy in American businesses, in *Writing Power*, Winsor studies the role of genre in upholding such asymmetrical power relations. Winsor’s analysis of genre builds off Longo’s and Foucault’s research on power and discipline, and describes the role of genres as shaping and maintaining relationships of subordination and power (1996, 2003). Resonant with Arendt and Zuboff, she writes:

Management was not a brute assertion of power. Rather, managers worked at least partly through controlling representations: they created representations of their own decisions and plans that were addressed to workers, and they required workers to create regulated representations of their activity that managers could use in decision making. Regulating through institutionalized representations meant that they were able to embed management concerns into the culture and practices of the organization itself so that most members engaged in carrying them out even without direct supervision from a manager. (52)

For Winsor, surveillance and discipline are embedded in organizational culture in part through representations. Just as Winner, Rinehart, and Longo point to the use of technology as mechanisms of control, Winsor demonstrates how organizations institute genres to preserve a hierarchy. Importantly, in such a structure, genres are created, institutionalized, and then functioned as gatekeepers of access and hierarchy over time. Drawing on Foucault, Giddons, Latour, Miller, and Longo, Winsor demonstrates it is within complex networks where genres take shape and then, conversely, shape the workflow through asymmetrical power relations.

Organizations tend to institutionalize genres that reinforce existing power relationships so that not all the writing people do is equally likely to be recognized as part of an organizational genre... Also, in their institutionalized form, organizational genres are not equally available to everyone in an organization. Rather, they become resources only for those who are authorized to use them. (*Writing Power* 10)

Winsor fuses Miller's definition of genre as social action where genres "represent a confluence of the creation of knowledge and the enactment of power" (*Writing Power* 16), with a

Foucauldian understanding of power as “...not a quality that anyone can ‘hold’ but a relationship that is always locally generated using means that include, but are not limited to, positions in a hierarchy....” (7). Control of representations is symbolic power.

This confluence of symbolic power and knowledge creation is similarly important in non-hierarchical business. In a collective, genres are essential stabilizing tools, keystones of collaboration, coordinated action, and deliberation (Winsor 2007). These boundary objects are points of agreement between disparate communities and, due in part to inevitable turnover, shape an organization over time (Star 1989). Devitt, Winsor, and Miller have shown genres are a stabilizing force (Devitt 1991; Miller 1984; Winsor 2007).

If, as Miller and others posit, genres are typified responses to typified social situations, *genericised* textual responses to a recurring situation, then understanding the social situations genres respond to is key to investigating networks of power in an organization (Miller 1984; Spinuzzi 2007; Winsor 2003), especially an organization that is as conscious of power relations as flat, flexible organizations.

## **Flat and Non-hierarchical Organizations**

In the last three decades, business and organizational researchers have studied the complexities and challenges of flat arrangements (Bosley 1991; Clark 2006; Conklin 2007; Drucker 1988; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 1996; Johnson-Eilola 1996; Kastle 2013; Leenders, van Engelen, and Kratzer 2003; Spinuzzi 2008, 2013, 2015; Star 1995; Waterman Jr. 1990; Williams 2007; Zuboff 1988). In a polycentric structure, each unit is specialized and virtually autonomous, reporting to the top while a centralized authority governs operations (Drucker 1987; Longo 2000; Winsor 2001; Zuboff 1988). These “flat structures” are less hierarchical, though not

necessarily more democratic, than conventional businesses (Drucker 1988; Williams 2007; Zuboff 1988). Drucker differentiates between command-and-control management styles like Taylorism from flat or “knowledge-based” management styles (3). Drucker points to the hospital, the symphony, or the British civic system in colonized India as examples of organizations functioning more or less horizontally, outside of the command-and-control style of traditional business (3): each unit is specialized and virtually autonomous, reporting to the top (5-6).

In his essay on flat structures, Drucker identifies four main issues with this type of management, issues that collective and cooperative management may also face.

1. Developing rewards, recognition, and career opportunities for specialists.
2. Creating a unified vision in an organization of specialists.
3. Devising the management structure for an organization of task forces.
4. Ensuring the supply, preparation, and testing of top management people. (8)

A flat structure does not necessarily mean a business is democratically controlled. It can still be autocratic with a central, single key player (Drucker 1987; Zuboff 1988).

Recent scholarship has taken up the concern of how this shift from top-down, command-and-control to team-based, decentralized work affects employee empowerment and agency (Clark 2006; Johnson-Eilola 1996; Spinuzzi 2013, 2014, 2015; Wilson 2001). With what they have termed “new capitalism,” Gee, Hull, and Lankshear summarize this shift in work organization with four points.

1. Productivity is based on knowledge, science, and technology.
2. Information and knowledge process are dominant, key activities for multinational businesses.

3. Companies are organized in radically different ways emphasizing flatter organizations, fewer levels of hierarchy, more cooperation, and flexible employees.
4. Competition and the market are now global and focused solely on rapidly fulfilling each individual customer's needs. (36-42)

However, Gee, Hull, and Lankshear argue employee agency under new capitalism is not empowerment at all. According to Faber's summary of their studies,

[They] argue that the rhetoric of new capitalism is "insulting to workers" despite its desire for fully informed and participatory employees. Although change projects... talk about empowered workers, information sharing, critical (outside-of-the-box) thinking, and creative expression, employees cannot actually engage in such behavior if the consequences are detrimental to the organization. The employees only have agency insofar as this agency acts in the interests of the company. (64-65)

While the language of new capitalism emphasizes empowerment and creativity, employees are constrained by the interests of the company. This creates a paradox between self-management and oversight: while promoting autonomy, creativity, and self-management, employees must internalize the ethos of the company to know where those limits are. Gee, Hull, and Lankshear write:

[T]he newly empowered and newly "critical thinking" workers cannot really question the goals, visions, and values that define the very parameters of the new capitalist business... The worker's "freedom" is fixed within the margins of the goals, ends, and vision set by the new capitalism and its theoreticians. The problem can be put another way: real commitment and belief... require that

learners be able to engage in genuine dialogue and contestation with viewpoints, but such genuine contestation is ultimately problematic in a business setting where, in the end, profit is the goal and the competition is at one's heels. (qt. in Faber 65)

Faber, Gee, Hull, Lankshear, and others argue new capitalism calls for a deeper level of investment shrouded in the language of democracy, but without the rewards (Clark 2006). Faber best sums up the contradiction between the language of new capitalism and actualization of employee agency: "Despite the claims of employee agency and accountability, the same dominant structures continue to rule the global playing field" (66). While they analyze the structures that enable and support inequity, they do not go so far as to take up other kinds of structures like cooperatives as alternatives that try to attain a business without inequity.

There are several shapes to flat arrangements of a workplace with a range of political commitments, each based on principles of autonomy and collaboration. Here, I focus on the network and its variants, comparing three types of organizations, broadly defined, along a spectrum of managerial oversight, from adhocracies to anarcho-syndicalism. While cooperatives may incorporate these arrangements, these examples are not cooperative per se as the defining feature of a cooperative is shared ownership and voluntary participation.

### **Adhocracy**

Adhocracy is a way of structuring around small ad hoc teams, rejecting or blending "bureaucracy," and "cutting through organization charters, departments, functions, job descriptions, hierarchy, and tradition" (Waterman Jr. 16). Waterman Jr. writes that ad hoc work groups can bring breakthroughs, creativity, and innovational problem solving when traditional

channels have failed. Creating a space theoretically outside hierarchical leadership roles of the organization, an ad hoc team purportedly levels the playing field in an effort to bring new ideas to the table (Waterman Jr. 1990). Waterman Jr. notes adhocracies often operate alongside bureaucracies, and are reactions to the stultifying effects of these bureaucracies, which he argues can inhibit change (17). In contrast, adhocracies are flexible. On the nature of bureaucracy, Waterman Jr. writes:

Structured work drives out the unstructured; that's almost the law of nature. The nature of adhocracy is both unstructured and very important, whereas the nature of bureaucracy is transfixed by structure and trivia. Because the structured organization takes precedence, opportunities get missed, crucial issues go unresolved, and efforts to change usually get nipped in the bud. (97)

Spinuzzi recently updated the concept of adhocracy to the all-edge adhocracy, which he describes as networked organizations characterized by “flat structure, changing composition, flexibility, and adaptability” (Spinuzzi 2013). According to Spinuzzi, the 1970s were characterized by bureaucracies, the 1990s by adhocracies, but the 2010s by all-edge adhocracies, ad hoc teams that are autonomous and allow for innovation (Spinuzzi 2013).

According to Waterman Jr., adhocracy co-exists alongside bureaucracy as they meet different needs of the organization. Bureaucracies stabilize while adhocracies innovate (Waterman Jr. 87). Cooperatives or conventional businesses may utilize ad hoc teams in their structure. Adhocracies themselves are not necessarily democratic or liberating, but can be incorporated into many kinds of structures.

## **Co-management**

In organizations that practice worker self-management, bureaucracy may be rejected altogether in favor of autonomous teams completely outside of explicit hierarchy, disregarding social hierarchies that may develop. Recalling Jamal's replacement through vote in Vignette #1, in an interview with the BBC, Alcides Rivero describes the sweeping rejection of hierarchy at one of Venezuela's government-owned aluminum plants entirely co-managed by the employees: "It's us, the workers, who decide on questions of production and technology, and it's us who elect who will be our managers," (Bruce 2005). At the same plant, a member from the personnel department, Marivit Lopez, draws attention to the budgeting process as all-hands-in: "The different departmental works councils are discussing and amending the existing proposal so that we get a budget that really fits the company's needs" (Bruce 2005). Lopez points to worker-focused polycentric management: each autonomous team works together to benefit themselves and the company. Like Waterman Jr.'s ad hoc groups, these teams cut across organizational lines and allow for innovation. However, in this scenario, this organization does not qualify as a cooperative because ownership of the company rests with the state rather than the workers themselves.

## **Anarcho-syndicalism**

At the end of the continuum of team-based, flat organizations is a post-capitalist model: anarcho-syndicalism. IIFOR defines anarchism as "coordination on equal footing, without superiors and subordinates" ("Horizontal Organization: A Brief Study"). Anarchism, broadly defined, is a rejection of rule, particularly managerial rule. Anarcho-syndicalism is an anti-capitalist philosophy of worker ownership rooted in unionism and total self-management.

Duncombe describes anarchy as “a close abstraction of the network: voluntary, nonhierarchical, with omnidirectional communication flows, and each citizen a creator/consumer” (Duncombe 188, qt. Farmer 50) and the modes of communication embody this philosophy. In his analysis of textual production in this framework, Farmer writes these networks represent “the merging of organic democratic participation with organic economic and cultural production” (51). Anarchic organizations are flat with each actor autonomous and independent. Without top-down oversight, these open, highly participatory organizations may form around an issue—ad hoc and autotelic—and then disperse. Cooperatives may incorporate aspects of this radical unionism, but a focus on maximizing individual liberty may make cooperation difficult. IIFOR writes, “The anarchist ideal has 100% horizontal organization, i.e. 100% socialism and autonomy, no hierarchy, and no authoritarian relations between people/persons, and no authorities political/administrative and economically, and no disorganization, chaotical tendencies” (“Economic-Political Sociology and Industrial Organization Research”; Restakis, 2010).

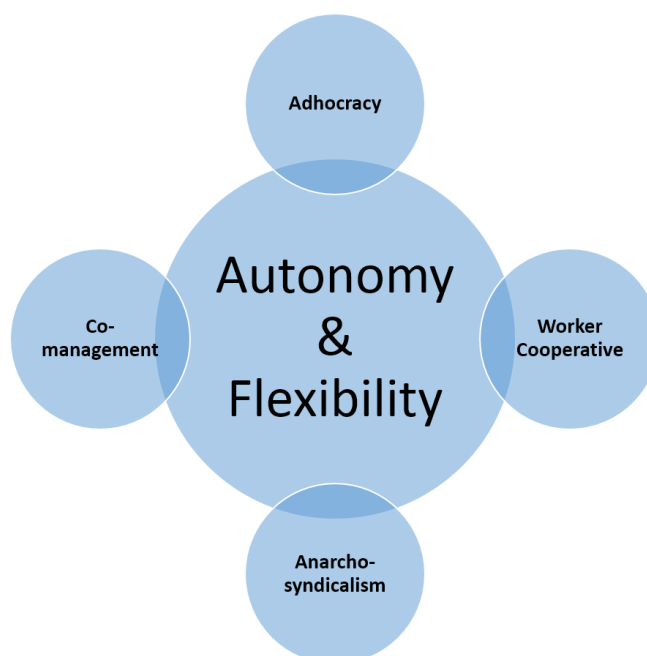


Figure 1: Overlap of flat arrangements

Each of these types of networked, horizontal organizations represents one way of organizing

around work in the age of new capitalism. Worker autonomy and flexibility are fundamental principles in each case, a similar foundation for worker cooperatives. However, cooperatives take autonomy and democratic participation even further, to shared ownership of the business itself.

## **Cooperative Business**

Constructed by and for its members, a cooperative challenges basic tenets of conventional business like top-down exertions of power through surveillance and texts. In this section, I first provide an overview of a cooperative and highlight some important features: a balance of community needs and profit, democratic member control, and profitability. I also explore some of the ways a collectively run cooperative differs from the conventional business model outlined above.

When the United Nations declared 2012 the Year of the Cooperative (IYC), it cited the importance of the cooperative to the social and economic wellbeing of the communities they serve ([social.un.org](http://social.un.org)). Because of the potentially unique contributions of cooperatives to economies of communities, the United Nations has taken a keen interest in cooperative development.

Cooperatives are business enterprises owned and controlled by the very members that they serve. Their member-driven nature is one of the most clearly differentiating factors of cooperative enterprises. This fact means that decisions made in cooperatives are balanced by the pursuit of profit, and the needs and interests of members and their communities. ([social.un.org](http://social.un.org))

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) defines a cooperative as “an autonomous

association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” (ica.coop). Importantly, advocates are careful to point out that it is this joint and democratic control and not any kind of eschewing of profit or capital that sets the cooperative model apart from other ways of doing business. Rather, the cooperative model seeks to *balance* profit with the needs of the communities they serve (social.un.org; Williams 2007; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.).

### **Democratic Control**

The cornerstone of a cooperative is democratic control. At least in theory, rather than ownership and control being in the hands of investors, a CEO, or the owner, the control rests with the multiple owners of the cooperative, operating on the “one person, one vote” principle (Zeuli and Cropp 45; see also Cheney 1995; Pittman n.d.; Murphy 2011; Riverwest Public House Cooperative Bylaws 2011). The foundational principle of democratic control is the barest definition of a cooperative and a trait all cooperatives share to a degree. In the preface to Williams’s comprehensive study of cooperatives, Cheney writes:

If there is a family resemblance among organizations which call themselves cooperatives, we may say that they share these aspects: 1) some commitment to collective if not necessarily equal ownership by members, 2) some commitment to democratic decision making by members, and 3) a belief in the viability of like experiments outside of their own experience. (xiv)

Cheney’s list of three defining aspects of a cooperative describes what democratic control, the single most distinctive feature of a cooperative, looks like in action: equality in ownership, democracy in decision-making, and viability of other kinds of experiments outside of their own

experience. These three aspects, along with other locally contingent values, help shape the cooperative to fit the particular needs of the community.

Democratic control is not mutually exclusive from profit. However, in the case of the cooperative, pursuit of profit is tempered by these other concerns and needs that are of equal importance. In other words, in order to meet these ethical and social obligations, the cooperative model must also be economically successful, stable, and sustainable.

### **Profit: Interdependent and Sustainable Communities**

Despite the possible complexities and difficulties of democratic control or the long-held belief in the necessity of the hierarchy in a business (Kastelle 2013; Winsor 2007), profit is not antithetical to cooperative principles. In fact, a cooperative can be extremely profitable. Zeuli and Cropp write:

Cooperatives do not, as is sometimes assumed, contradict the goals of capitalism.

If that were the case, cooperatives would not play such an important role in the American economy. (2)

In fact, large enterprises in the United States are cooperatives, including Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI), Ocean Spray, Sunkist, Land O' Lakes, and over 10,000 credit unions (Williams 14-16). Internationally, the success of the Mondragon Cooperative has surpassed expectations, impacting the economy of the Basque region of Spain and serving as an example to many cooperatives and communities around the world (Billeaux et al. 2011; Cheney 1995; Dewan 2014; Murphy 2011; Riverwest Public House Cooperative Board Manual 2013; Williams 2007; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.).

The lasting success of cooperatives is due in part to the interdependence of the

cooperatives and the communities they serve. Williams argues that both the early success and the long-term sustainability of a cooperative rely on continued community investment, which rivals or surpasses corporations.

[N]ational records show that 60 to 80 percent of corporations in the US [sic] fail after their first year in business, and cooperatives fail only at the rate of about 10 percent after their first year (WOCCU 2003). The initial success of a cooperative most likely arises from the fact that starting a cooperative requires a great deal of support from the community. Many people must be involved for the successful cooperative to file for incorporation or limited liability, so that few are likely to fail within the first few years of operation. Cooperatives are also more likely to survive in the long term. More than 90 percent of cooperatives are still operating while only 3-5 percent of standard corporations remain active after five years. (9-10)

Current research shows this relationship between cooperative ownership and productivity is more complex than previously thought, and may depend on the level of participation at the managerial level (Logue and Yates 101-104). Nevertheless, most scholarship agrees that cooperatives' commitment to community arises in that it is operated and owned *by the community itself*, for the benefit of the community. According to Williams and Murphy, if a community organizes and opens a cooperative, it will keep the doors open for longer periods, longer perhaps than corporations will. If a cooperative opens at all, it is statistically going to be in operation longer than non-cooperative businesses (Dewan 2014; Murphy 2011; Williams 2007).

Scholars have speculated the reason for cooperative profitability and sustainability is that

most cooperatives are small and labor-intensive and are not reliant on “innovations in product or technology” (Dewan 2014; Rinehart 2006). There are notable exceptions, but most cooperatives cannot afford to build their business around innovative technology and instead operate in industries without that need, which may actually contribute to their success and long-term profitability (Cheney 1995; Rinehart 2006).

The profitability and sustainability of the cooperative model make it an attractive business model in the U.S. and abroad. Recent United Nations statistics show the cooperative movement is expanding in countries all over the world, including the United States.

The country with the largest number of individual members indirectly represented by the ICA is the United States with 305.6 million members. There are nearly 30,000 co-operatives in the U.S. [ica.coop](http://ica.coop)

Cooperatives have been a force in the U.S. economy since its foundation. According to Zeuli and Cropp, the first cooperative was founded in 1752 and the first cooperative law was established in 1865 (56). Seven percent of the U.S. population are members of a cooperative (12).

The cooperative model is a significant contributor to the U.S. economy. The University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives provides up-to-date statistics in their economic report “Research of the Economic Impact of Cooperatives.” According to their recent study, nearly 30,000 U.S. cooperatives account for more than

- \$3 trillion in assets
- \$653 billion in revenue
- Two million jobs
- \$75 billion in wages ([reic.uwcc.wisc.edu/issues/](http://reic.uwcc.wisc.edu/issues/))

So then, contrary to the common belief that cooperatives and democratic control are antithetical

to profit, scholars have shown that the economic vitality of a cooperative firm can match or exceed that of conventional firms (Cheney 1995; Fakhfakh, Perotin, and Gago 2009; Dewan 2014; Kastle 2013). In his response to criticism of the cooperative model as unprofitable, Cheney counters profitability is required in order for the cooperative to exist, and cooperation and profit are not mutually exclusive, challenging the assumption that profitability and broader community goals are incompatible.

For cooperative and alternative organizations themselves, obviously they cannot have a social impact without sheer economic survival. This is the type of “realism” typically addressed at those who start up worker and other kinds of co-ops. The obverse of this question, though, is equally important: of what good is “prosperity” if it does not include a broader commitment to workers, the community, and the environment? (xvii)

As Cheney points out, the primary difference between the conventional and the cooperative is not whether or not either can economically survive, but instead, what prosperity brings. For the cooperative, the answer lies in part in benefits to its members and the communities in which it exists, in contrast to a conventional firm that may be driven by profit for shareholders or the owner (Zeuli and Cropp n.d.). The widespread adoption of the Rochdale principles is an example of this value-driven economic commitment.

### **Balance of Community Needs**

The Rochdale Principles are foundational values adopted by many cooperatives. These seven principles are named after the successful Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a large successful cooperative that formed because of a labor dispute

(RWPH Board Manual 2013; Williams 2007; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.). These principles, sometimes known as the “Rochdale Principles of Cooperation,” have become generally accepted guidelines for cooperative enterprise around the world (sometimes modified for legal or other restraints), and form the base of cooperative economic theory.

1. Voluntary and open membership
2. Domestic member control
3. Member economic participation
4. Autonomy and independence
5. Education, training, and information
6. Cooperation among cooperatives
7. Concern for community (Riverwest Public House Cooperative Board Manual 4-5; Williams 12; Zeuli and Cropp 9)

These values reflect a cornerstone of cooperative identity: a tangible demonstration of compassionate concern and a balance between community, member involvement, and profit. In addition to civic concern distinguishing cooperatives from conventional ventures, cooperatives potentially offer a sustainable business model based on reciprocity between business and community (ica.coop; Murphy 2011; social.un.org; Williams 2007; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.).

## **Cooperative Management**

Within the bounds of democratic control, a cooperative can be managed in several ways, including incorporating a hierarchy that resembles a conventional business. The three most recognized options for management and ownership models are

- Employee stock ownership plan (ESOP)
- Worker-owned cooperative
- Worker collective (Zeuli and Cropp 37)

As an ownership model, ESOPs may resemble traditional business in that the workers may institute a traditional managerial structure; ownership may be predicated on the length of service, hours worked, or other restraints. In contrast, the worker-owned cooperative and worker collective have workers at the center of management directly controlling the business.

### **Worker-Owned Cooperative**

In a worker-owned cooperative, the employees legally own the business, but only employees are allowed to be members ([newerawindows.com](http://newerawindows.com); [isthmuseng.com](http://isthmuseng.com); [cultivate.coop](http://cultivate.coop)). Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing (IEM) is one example of a widely successful worker-owned cooperative (Billeaux et al. 2011).

Worker cooperatives are a cooperative in which the members are the working staff. Management decisions are made democratically: one member-one vote.

Each member shares in the responsibility of managing the business.

[isthmuseng.com](http://isthmuseng.com)

A recent study concluded:

IEM, as a worker-owned cooperative, has not only been successful in surviving in a high-technology industry for over three decades, but it grown [*sic*], recorded stable revenues, and has provided competitive incomes for its employees.

(Billeaux et al. 3)

The success of Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing in a struggling field demonstrates how

democratic control is a viable structure in a highly technical, competitive business.

### **Worker Collective**

Another type of cooperative management is the worker collective. A collective is a group without a hierarchy (cultivate.coop). A worker collective, then, is a group of workers functioning without hierarchy. Like a worker cooperative, employees jointly make decisions about the daily operations of the business. Zeuli and Cropp describe worker collective management.

The term *collective* in this context refers to a management style rather than an ownership model. Thus, a worker-owned cooperative can also be a collective.

Collectives are managed by the entire membership instead of a select membership team; they have a flat management structure rather than a hierarchal one. (37)

Collective organization is a form of management that does not necessarily rely on a general manager for direction, discipline, or daily operations of the business. Although the workers themselves may appoint a manager, this structure is not imposed, but would necessarily have to arise from the workers and be responsible to the workers (“Job Descriptions”). In addition, because the manager was elected rather than appointed from above, the manager answers to—and may be relieved by—the other workers. Cooperators call this reciprocity: “managing the manager” (Patty<sup>2</sup>). This reciprocity in effect neutralizes the asymmetrical power dynamic in worker-manager hierarchies because the workers are able to exert some control over management—in theory, and in actuality (see Vignette 1; Longo 80; Winsor *Writing Power* 7).

Membership in the collective grants the worker decision-making power. Unlike

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<sup>2</sup> Name, gender, and other identifying characteristics have been changed.

conventional firms where decisions are made by a handful of qualified individuals, with or without feedback from the employees, in a collective, each member is expected to fully participate and decisions are made by the group. This act demonstrates that worker autonomy and valued labor are driving principles of worker collectivity (Riverwest Public House Cooperative Bylaws 2011). The values and operations of a worker collective are a stark contrast to the operations of top-down management, what Drucker calls a “command-and-control model that business took from the military 100 years ago” (3). Power and hierarchy in this command-and-control model have historically been the main concern of professional and technical scholarship.

## **An Evaluation of Power and Hierarchy in Conventional and Cooperative Firms**

*Authority is whatever makes people obey. -Hannah Arendt*

A Foucauldian analysis of power in an organization asks “how” rather than “who” or “why,” and views power as a set of relations—however unequal—existing as a web or network, and not as an object or force any one person can possess (Herndl and Licona 2007; Winsor 2003, 2007). Professional communication scholarship has long deployed a Foucauldian lens when examining power (Henry 2010; Longo 2000; Clark 2007; Winsor 1993, 2003). Using this lens, Winsor writes that in hierarchical companies, power is never distributed equally.

The uneven distribution of power is not due to individual heroic accomplishments that result in merited differences. Rather it is accomplished in the systematic use of sociotechnical means, including generic texts... that slip unnoticed beneath the surface of everyday life... [P]ower is constructed in the trivialities of everyday

life that are so taken for granted as to be transparent to us. (155)

Power is best understood as a set of relations, and understanding power as a relation resists positioning it as an object that can be possessed. Instead, power rests at an intersection of several different practices. This change in view from power as a possession to power as a node in a network also shifts the way we think about agency.

If we understand power as a set of relations... it no longer requires that we connect it to an autonomous individual. So, too, with agency. It does not reside in a set of objective rhetorical abilities of a rhetor, or even her past accomplishments. Rather, agency exists at the intersection of a network of semiotic, material, and yes, intentional elements and relational practices. (Herndl and Licona 137)

Like Herndl and Licona, Winsor, and Longo, Russell dismisses the notion that power can be possessed or that it flows through a system. Instead, for Russell, it is mediated and localized.

Power appears in specific, locatable occasions of mediated action and is created in the network of many localized instances. It is not an inchoate climate of force or terror, although such atmospheres are (re)created by the operationalizing of specific actions in mediated activity systems. (524)

How does power operate through a collective? What does agency look like? Without a set of firm bureaucratic structures in place, the habitus of subordination and command, the religion and mythos of authority empowering a manager and ensuring obedience, how does power operate without clear-cut networks (Arendt 1961; Rinehart 2006; Zuboff 1988)? If power is a set of relations at the “intersection of a network of semiotic, material, intentional and relational practices,” then perhaps within a structureless organization relying on social contracts between

players (Freeman 1), social capital gains primacy. By means of tools like genres and other symbolic power, access to established authorities like founders, demonstrations of commitment, and even proximity, certain people establish relations that empower them more than others. In such an environment, the kinds of social conditions that matter might include

- Longevity of service
- Time on the job and the visibility and articulation of that work
- Leisure time to devote to the business
- Access to authorized representations
- Access to the elected leaders or becoming an elected leader themselves
- Access to meetings, both formal and informal
- Visible articulations of intellect, wealth, and education
- Gender, race, and class, according to the bias of the group
- The ability to operationalize on the rhetoric of empowerment.

Without the bureaucratic structure of a hierarchy, perhaps these practices create the conditions for power and can become embedded in the genres they produce (Arendt 1961; Freeman 1970).

At question is how authority works, including who has authorized textual access, within an organization that is supposedly flat. Mirroring traditional organizations, some mechanisms seem to authorize some actors over others. Arendt writes, “Authority precludes the use of external means of coercion where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation” (2). This section compares and contrasts manifestations of power and hierarchy in cooperatives and conventional organizations through rhetorics of empowerment and the mechanisms of surveillance at work in an ostensibly democratic workplace.

## **Rhetoric of Empowerment**

One example of how power works in collective management is through rhetorics of empowerment. Although it has not been studied in a cooperative, professional communication has long analyzed the instantiation of rhetorics of empowerment, its pervasiveness, and the resulting re-investment of worker capital. Clark defines empowerment as broadly including a “sense of the reward system afforded by the job, personal autonomy, pay, benefits, the ability to choose tasks and structure one’s day, and the value placed on work by colleagues” (161). Rinehart, Clark, and Cheney’s work support the idea that “empowerment” includes some sort of control over their work, including the “intensity and duration,” and the “ability to define the manner in which work is organized, divided and allocated...” (Rinehart 12; Cheney 5; Clark 169, 171). Narratives of empowerment that promise autonomy, like those researched by Clark, contrast Cheney’s definition of workplace democracy.

A system of governance which truly values individual goals and feelings (e.g., equitable remuneration, the pursuit of enriching work and the right to express oneself as well as typically organizational objectives (e.g., effectiveness and efficiency, reflectively conceived), which actively fosters the connection between those two sets of concerns by encouraging individual contributions to important organizational choices, and which allows for the ongoing modification of the organization's activities and policies by the group. (5)

Empowerment and workplace democracy have two facets: the narratives and the actualization. Rinehart, Cheney, and Clark have critiqued narratives of empowerment as potentially disempowering workers. Clark’s critique asserts that the rhetoric of empowerment may be operationalized to actually require more work, especially managerial work, without the social,

economic, and other work-related rewards of managerial work.

In the past, rhetorics of empowerment have taken varying forms. Rinehart and Cheney have both critiqued worker councils in which companies organize workers on a council as a way of providing some input, however limited, to the owners and managers. Similarly, the “Quality of Work Life” movement in the 1970s emphasized individual participation and cooperation. Rinehart argues these management-worker innovations and “empowering” work movements were a way to placate employees without giving them real access to influence (Rinehart 49; see also Cheney 5; Zuboff 241-242). He further argues workplaces’ reformation toward participatory management or including workers on management councils (or even ESOPs) were a way to mollify workers, to “circumvent genuine unions” or other democratic mechanisms (49). Of this very issue, Shaila Dewan recently wrote in *New York Times Magazine*:

...a workplace doesn't have to be managed by committee in order to channel more of the capital share to labor. Workers can just be given stock... But even this can be just another management strategy to harness the increased productivity that, studies have shown, accompany employee-ownership and profit sharing.  
(2014)

A rhetoric of empowerment, including ESOPs, can be a powerful tactic used by management to extract more from workers (Dewan 2014; Logue and Yates 2001).

Examining the promise of narratives of empowerment from a position of democracy and empowerment, Cheney provides a useful heuristic that locates democratic empowerment as delimited and defined by three factors.

1. The range of issues treated in a particular program
2. The extent of actual influence by employees

### 3. The highest levels at which influence is exercised (13)

For example, a worker's council may have access to a broad range of issues and some actual influence, but may only exercise that influence on the lowest levels of a corporate structure, or may provide council, but not actually influence change. This rubric will be useful later on in my project as I try to quantify the empowerment of workers in the Workers Collective. The pervasive and penetrating influence of rhetoric of empowerment in the cooperative structure goads the worker or volunteer under the auspices of a higher calling of "democracy" and "autonomy."

Due in part to cooperatives operationalizing their own unique rhetoric of empowerment, many studies point to worker-run businesses having a higher level of productivity than a traditionally run business (Craig and Pencavel 1995; Doucouliagos 1995; Fakhfakh, Virginie and Gago 2009; Rinehart 2006). Despite the comprehensive studies of the rhetoric of empowerment in conventional businesses, the potential for capitalizing on the rhetoric of empowerment for greater expenditures of labor does not stop there. The possibility of exploitation of workers within a cooperative is evident in Rinehart's description of worker cooperatives.

Despite the failures, worker cooperatives often have excellent results in terms of normal criteria of business success... If sales drop, workers take pay cuts and collectively reduce their working hours. One economic advantage enjoyed by cooperatives is that workers' commitment and diligence is high. This produces a second advantage: less supervision is needed than in conventional firms. (211)

Though arguably a cynical view, there is a possibility for exploitation of such commitment, especially if the position is already a low paying job, as is the case with many service industry cooperatives like the one I studied.

Because of this commitment and the desire for consent and unanimity, the rhetoric of empowerment is a feedback loop and a powerful management tactic weaved into the narrative of the cooperative, enabling and constraining workers (Foucault 1979; Longo 2000; Winsor 2003). While Clark, Longo, Winsor, and others have not yet covered collective management or worker cooperatives, Clark provides a useful heuristic for investigating power/empowerment in co-ops.

In Clark's essay, the habitus-hierarchy dialectic provides the potential for empowerment. Habitus is "the set of durable dispositions inculcated in the subject by her past experiences, and these dispositions adjust the subject's rhetorical actions to the continually changing situation." (Bourdieu 53, quoted in Herndl and Licona 138). The dialectic between habitus and hierarchy mediated through a rhetoric of worker empowerment in the cooperative model may actually disempower workers. In other words, if there are no mechanisms to address dysfunction or to ensure accountability or transparency, or if the power to remove an ineffectual employee is diffused among many workers, some of whom have competing interests, the goals of worker empowerment may fall short (Clark 2006; Freeman n.d.).

Clark points to narratives of empowerment as "regulated information access, but also by position, education, profession, and the solidification and dissolution of organizational networks" (155). As Clark talks about new technologies in our culture sold using narratives of empowerment and democratization (157), so cooperatives have their own rhetoric of empowerment and democratization, operationalized to gain consent from the workers. The story here is changed only slightly. Just as a conventional workplace can deploy a rhetoric of empowerment to convince employees to take on managerial tasks (and the accompanying mechanisms and technologies that control that influence), cooperatives can do the same, but without the incentive of financial rewards (Clark 156). In a worker cooperative where

responsibility is diffused among a group, the few with a little more power than others (discussed later) can operationalize this narrative to gain consent and/or unanimity. From bylaws to worker protocol documents to PR and marketing materials, texts reinforce the narrative that at a cooperative, employees are *more* empowered, simultaneously selling the cooperative ideas to both the workers and the public, while encouraging workers to take on more to maintain/support that empowerment, without financial rewards, as Rinehart, Cheney, and others have pointed out.

The cooperative structure, often under collective management, demands and receives a higher member and community investment in place of traditional capital investors. As a business that commonly eschews traditional debt, community investment is key to the economic success of this business and of cooperatives in general (Williams 2007; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.). Murphy states this community investment is fundamental to the economic viability of the cooperative.

...[C]o-ops with strong early-membership bases often have the support of the community and loyal clientele that keeps them in business for a prolonged period of time. Co-ops without this fundamental asset do not open for business at all.

(19)

Therefore, beyond a leftist curiosity, the prosperity and continued success of a worker-run business can add to workplace communications unique examples of collective management: the activity of ongoing negotiations without a centralized structure, which includes a rhetoric of empowerment and operationalizing consent of the Collective. A study of their communication practices—the successes and the disruptions—could add to and possibly reconfigure what we think about typified group communication and recurrent empowerment narratives, how workers communicate with each other to monitor and maintain power and to ensure productivity.

An investigation into the productivity and economic success of a deliberately democratic

organization could be beneficial for business research in gaining an understanding of the relationship between hierarchy, capital, and worker productivity. How the cooperative model is gaining ground in a tough economy when it demands *more* capital from its members and the surrounding communities while demanding *more* of its workers for lower wages could inform—and possibly reform—professional communication to consider models that are more deliberately democratic (Murphy 2011; Williams 2007; ica.coop).

### **Democracy under Surveillance: Cooperative Management and Mutual Monitoring**

The seventh Rochdale Principle prioritizes a concern for the community (Williams 2007; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.). However, despite good intentions, cooperative management may fall into some of the old Taylorist narratives and management strategies. Rinehart suggests that due to market forces, a cooperative can come to resemble a conventional business, propelled solely by profitability despite its democratic nature.

Profitability has to be an essential criterion of operating the business, and this exerts a powerful influence on the policies and operations of worker-owned firms. Consequently, the technology, division of labor, and work procedures of worker-owned enterprises come to resemble the structures that prevail in capitalist firms. As Marx recognized, “The co-operative factors of labourers themselves represent with the old form the first sprouts of the new, although they naturally reproduce, and must reproduce everywhere in their actual organization all the shortcomings of the prevailing system.” (Marx 440, qt. Rinehart 212)

After all, cooperatives—like all movements and institutions—are built from the available models and tools (Polletta 221). In the case of an alternative business model, there is a limited repertoire

of management strategies from which to choose.

Cooperatives often have explicit hierarchies. Each cooperative has a Board of Directors, employees (or volunteers), and owners. In the case of a worker cooperative, the employees are the owners and may sit on the Board of Directors. Wisconsin law dictates that each cooperative must have a Board of Directors in correlation to its member base (Zeuli and Cropp n.d.). A cooperative can resemble a conventional business with its goals balanced with a clear dedication to democratic control by its members.

A similar system of surveillance and control that underpins conventional firms is intact and operational in many collectives and worker cooperatives alike. Collectives utilize shared supervising, relying on group norms, internalization of rules, and vigilance for deviation of norms and etiquette set by the group (Polletta 16). In a worker collective, the mechanism of observation and mutual reporting often remains intact, but with a plan for substitution in case the management system breaks down. This substitution could be a human resources committee, a trusted member of the cooperative or community, or a Board of Directors. Cheney and Billeaux et al.'s research on democratic management shows how collective management adopted similar systems of surveillance and, removing the management gaze, dispersed it into a crowd of observers.

Among cooperatives, this dispersal is sometimes called mutual monitoring (Billeaux et al. 2011; Cheney 1995). Cheney describes mutual monitoring as “looking over each other’s shoulders, group observations,” or in a leaderless group or group without an outside supervisor, “group members can develop an internal system of discipline that involves a great deal of monitoring of one another and a corresponding loss of individual autonomy” (9). The efficacy of mutual monitoring is evident when comparing a conventionally structured business’s operation

of panoptic observation to IEM. From Billeaux et al.'s case study on IEM:

It cannot be overstated that the cooperative structure of the firm has a major impact on how employees experience their work. They consistently pointed out absence of hierarchy. There is no particular person within the firm to whom they must answer, who is continually compelling them to work, and who has the last word on project designs. Instead, they pointed to self-motivation and mutual monitoring as the most important incentives to work, as opposed to being “under the thumb” of management. (10)

Under a cooperative structure like IEM, worker productivity, discipline, and timely action are supervised through mutual monitoring, rather than by an overseer or the internalization of rules.

A collective by definition is antithetical to a formalized hierarchy. However, a collective also has the potential to be appropriated for undemocratic purposes. For example, an informal hierarchy may take shape. In fact, Freeman writes the lack of clear structure opens a vacuum for elites, “stars,” and friend groups to take power over the rest of the group. Freeman seems to agree with Fagle’s above definition of hierarchical advancement as a fundamental human motive, inescapable even in the most “structureless” organization (1) and Kastle says operating without hierarchy can be difficult and seemingly impossible. In “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” Freeman criticizes the structurelessness and seemingly flat structure of the second-wave feminist movement (1970). Freeman argues that the structurelessness of many in second-wave consciousness-raising and action groups actually created a vacuum that allowed a small privileged group to gain power without the checks and balances of a formalized structure.

A “laissez-faire” group is about as realistic as a “laissez-faire” society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned

hegemony over others. (1)

This habitus-hierarchy dialectic could result in an imbalance of power, settling social capital in the hands of a few “stars” or “friend groups” (Freeman 2) to do what could be called the “heavy lifting” of the group, but without the mechanism of oversight.

Decisions can be made outside of meetings in a social setting, seemingly as harmless as sitting around having beers and hashing out the topics or issues that the business has been facing. These discussions may happen informally as business comes up in discussion among friends. Solutions can be thought up together, but only with the input of this particular friend group. People who are not a part of this friend group can be felt “swept up” by the majority or friend group bloc. In this way, consent of the whole collective and, in a sense, the democratic goal of the group is side-stepped (Freeman 3; Polletta 140, 166-167).

This affinity dynamic is actually complex—and Freeman acknowledges this complexity—because the affinity group can act with expediency and swiftness with productive problem-solving discussion (albeit, with fewer members). Relying on larger group discussion to solve problems can be a difficult, tedious, and unreliable process especially with people who are new or unknowledgeable about business, people with their own agendas or grudges, etc. (Freeman 1971; Polletta 2002). This friend-group problem solving is streamlined and efficient, able to keep up with the speed of business and the daily, real demands of management. It might be discovered that friend groups are necessary in order to run a business efficiently. As we will see later, an unchecked collective of people can form cliques or hierarchies within an ostensibly democratic workplace and this affinity dynamic can become written into the very governmental texts they produce. The tension at the heart of this structure is part of a larger discussion between participatory democracy commitments and the need for practical strategy (Polletta 2002).

Collective management is unique because democratic control necessitates negotiation and deliberation, in contrast to businesses built around maximum efficiency and profit, where democratic control could slow down the process.

## **Overview of the Project**

### **Research Questions**

The main purpose of my project is to find out more about the kind of genres cooperatives employ and how these genres mediate change in the cooperatives. I argue the Public House is rhetorically constructed and reconstructed by ongoing negotiations among stakeholders, and strengthened by narratives of democracy and empowerment. These negotiations are mediated through tools including email and SMS, incorporating and supporting an atmosphere of democracy and consent—a key value of the cooperative—while ensuring work is done on time and within budget. This ongoing mediation is key to the enrollment of actors as well as gaining and retaining consent and unanimity of the Collective.

My study was guided by the following questions on what collective management can offer professional communication scholarship.

1. How does a cooperative employ genres differently?
2. What do these texts tell us about how power is distributed in a cooperative?
3. How do the genres it employs affect organizational change?

Focusing on these questions will help me understand the configurations of power at this site.

## **Dissertation Chapters**

### 2: Research Design and Methodology

I explain why conducting a qualitative case study is the best way to investigate collective management and communication practices, and to address my research questions. I provide my rationale for the study design and methodology, and describe my role as the participant/observer and someone who plays multiple roles in this research site.

### 3: Rhetorical Construction of the Public House

I begin to answer my research questions as I examine how the Public House is constructed rhetorically through tight networks of people and the genres they created and employed. I argue for a profound contradiction between values and practice.

### 4: Dream and Death of a Dream: Rearrangement of an Organization through Rhetorical Strategy

I examine the transient nature of the Public House. Looking at unifying documents created at different points in time, I trace organizational changes and the narratives that facilitated those changes. Because people involved had direct access to governance, they could pivot in a very short time. This unfettered access resulted in a nimble, responsive organization.

### 5: Conclusion: Implications for the Field

I conclude this project by considering the implications this project could have on the fields of professional communication and cooperative development. I also suggest implications for actor-network theory and genre theory. I conclude with a look toward future research projects.

## **Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Methods**

In the last chapter, I provided an overview of cooperative and traditional businesses, explored some areas of contrast or similarities between them, and established the problems of assumptions in professional communication research. Emerging theories point to the need for a new model for understanding communication in horizontal organizations. In this chapter, I will explain why the best way to study collective management and communication practices—and to address my research questions—is to conduct a qualitative case study. First, I offer an overview of my research site and my research questions, hypothesis, and rationale for the study design and methodology. Second, I clarify how I addressed the criteria for judging the quality of research design—construct validity, internal/external validity, reliability. Finally, I address my role as the participant/observer, and as someone who plays multiple roles in this research site.

The aim of this project was to identify the complexities of collective management at the Public House, how negotiations of power occur, their effects on productivity, and how and in what ways communication tools are appropriated in the negotiation process. To conduct systematic research, data collection, and analysis, I employed actor-network theory and genre theory to analyze organizational communication and productivity within the Collective and the Board against the backdrop of day-to-day operations.

### **Research Setting**

An analysis of the strengths and limitations of collective management within a successful cooperative would benefit professional communication scholarship by adding an understanding of the practices of a model with limited investigation to date. The prime setting for my research

was Public House, a collectively run, cooperatively owned bar in the working-class neighborhood of Riverwest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Wisconsin has the legal and political infrastructure, the financial climate (Williams 2007; Rinehart 2006; Lawless and Reynolds 2004), and deeply rooted cultural leanings to support cooperatives. Wisconsin has been an epicenter of the labor movement and the cooperative economy, in the form of agricultural, health, and consumer cooperatives, for decades. Wisconsin passed its first cooperative law in 1887, but in 1911, it passed a comprehensive bill that has since been copied by many other states (Zeuli and Cropp 25). This statute, Chapter 185, outlines the legal and financial obligations for cooperative operation including responsibilities to members, and gives affordances to cooperatives as a legal business under governmental purview. Because of this infrastructure, Wisconsin is home to many cooperatives including agricultural, health care, food, service industry, distribution, and housing cooperatives.

With a population of 13,065 (“Riverwest neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin”), Riverwest is a small, diverse neighborhood situated between Capitol Drive on the north, North Avenue on the south, Holton Street on the west, and the Milwaukee River on the east. Riverwest is home to many grassroots neighborhood events like large street and music festivals, a 24-hour DIY bike race, public theater performances, a free night school, a community nurse, a non-profit community newspaper, after school programs, victory gardens, a large solar funding project, a community-run radio station with all original content, and a community free space. Due to cooperative support on the state level, a higher than average education (“Riverwest neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin”), and the existing energy of community spirit, grassroots activism, and a DIY habitus that could be described as “progressive” or “radical,” Riverwest is uniquely home to more cooperatives than an average neighborhood, including

- Riverwest Co-op and Café
- Riverwest Bakery Co-op
- Eight Limbs Housing Cooperative
- People’s Books Cooperative
- Riverwest Investment Cooperative
- Riverwest Yogashala
- Riverwest Public House Cooperative
- Outpost Natural Foods
- Milwaukee River Advocates

The Riverwest Cooperative Alliance (RCA) is a new cooperative that views itself as an umbrella organization that supports and starts more cooperatives. A self-described “co-op of co-ops,” RCA capitalized on the ruling of Citizens United, which affirmed the legal personhood of a business. In this case, the businesses themselves become members of a larger cooperative. The website describes the group as a “cooperative alliance of organizations dedicated to fostering an equitable and democratic economy in the Riverwest Neighborhood of Milwaukee, Wisconsin” (“Riverwest Cooperative Alliance”).

In a community with dozens of cooperatives, Public House is a prime location because it is relatively new (less than three years old at the time of writing) and because it operates as one of three cooperatively owned bars in the country (at the time of writing). That this type of cooperative is less common but growing means that there are few extant structures from which to draw up the business. Most of the Public House practices, like many cooperatives, are emergent and contingent, heavily reliant on experts and seasoned “cooperators” in the group. These features are key to serving communities and to the cooperative’s survival.

The Public House has a two-tiered pyramid structure. The top tier consists of member-owners, individuals who have bought into the cooperative by paying a fee of either \$40 annually or \$200 for a lifetime membership (or five years of consecutive membership) (“Membership”). Membership benefits—some of which are dictated by state law—include participating in member-only events and voting in elections (“Membership”; Zeuli and Cropp n.d.). The second tier consists of the Workers Collective and the Board of Directors.

The Workers Collective, a collective of employees and contractors including bouncers, bartenders, an inventory coordinator, an events coordinator, and a finance team, manages the Public House. The Workers Collective is responsible for the daily operations of the bar including hiring and training, inventory, and event planning. In addition to working closely with member-owners and the community, the Collective reports directly to the Board of Directors. The Workers Collective may elect team leaders.

The Board of Directors is a group of nine members democratically elected by co-op members in a ballot vote. Wisconsin law dictates its existence and responsibilities, as the Board is legally responsible “for the co-op’s continued viability” and is accountable to the member-owners (Zeuli and Cropp 50). In addition to being formally accountable for the actions of the cooperative, the Board oversees the Workers Collective (Riverwest Public House Cooperative Bylaws 2011).

Though the Board of Directors shoulders the burden of legal responsibility, the bar operates exclusively by collective management. That this style is effective is especially curious given the scale of the operations and events workers accomplish via negotiation, from at-capacity member-only events to hosting important speakers, politicians, and music groups. Last year, the bar was named the second best music venue in Milwaukee, over-taking single-owned

establishments that have been operating for much longer. Additionally, the bar supports a full bartending, cleaning, auxiliary, and door-tending staff and continues to be economically self-sufficient, avoiding traditional debt.

## **Design of the Project: Methodologies**

Given the unique distribution of power at the Public House, I need to use nimble and open methodologies and methods. They also must allow for fluctuation, system analysis, and textual analysis. Both actor-network theory and a social theory of genre meet these conditions.

### **Actor-network Theory**

Because the Public House deliberately functions as a horizontal network with a range of actors including people, texts, a physical location, disease, organization charts, etc., actor-network theory is well suited for this project. Actor-network theory is popular in the humanities and social sciences as a way to account for durability and stability in assemblages (Latour 1991). In actor-network theory, these assemblages are made of humans and nonhumans, who play a part through acts of delegation and enrollment (Latour “Where” 177). Latour argues that one way nonhuman actants participate in our lives is by disciplining us to act or refrain from acting in a certain way. Through an act of substitution, “a delegated nonhuman character” would ensure a certain task is completed (“Where” 157). For example, a pneumatic door-closer shuts the door behind us to ensure a door is closed (but not slammed). Actor-network theory is one way to explain “how stability and domination may be accounted for once non-humans are woven into the social fabric,” (Latour “Technology” 103). The inclusion of nonhumans in its analysis is a hallmark feature of actor-network theory, a way to “challenge assumptions about social context

of machines,” these actants who are a part of our daily experience, who co-constitute our lives and our work (“Missing” 153). For Latour, discipline occurs through these acts of substitution: “...every time you want to know what a nonhuman does, simply imagine what other humans or other nonhumans would have to do were this character not present” (“Where” 155).

Actor-network theory has been used appropriately to analyze communication systems. For example, in “Who Killed Rex?” Spinuzzi hybridized actor-network theory and rhetorical analysis to analyze telecommunication systems, using an approach that is both “political and rhetorical” and includes looking at the “political/rhetorical movements of complex heterogeneous networks” (“Who” 50-51). Like Spinuzzi, I splice actor-network theory with rhetorical analysis: careful consideration of the content of the enrolled texts and the *connections* between the texts and participants, for an analysis that is flat, inclusive of nonhuman agency, and political/rhetorical. As actor-network theory is intentionally apolitical, this hybridization creates a productive tension between the two approaches. I believe using a modified actor-network methodology that allows for rhetorical analysis will enable me to understand not only processes of delegation, enrollment and translation at work in Public House networks, but also the political and rhetorical nature of the texts themselves.

Actor-network theory is radically symmetrical. Rather than human-centered theory, which places a premium on human agency and activity, actor-network theory supports a broader examination of actors—both big and small—and is useful for analyzing and understanding the networks that support an organization, itself a network and an actant (Latour 1992, 1999; Mara and Hawk 2010; Spinuzzi 2007). This symmetrical, non-Cartesian approach is sometimes troubling for humanists as it politicizes material artifacts, even seemingly mundane texts like

intra-business communication. This inclusion of mundane texts makes actor-network theory well suited for a network like the Public House that relies on unifying documents.

Transcription and enrollment are central to many actor-network approaches. Latour, Star, and Myers are interested in “what it means to be enrolled in a network,” how these “little actors become big actors” by “translating the interests of other actors and *enrolling* them,” often through exchanges of power, money, commodities, obedience, etc. (Myers 12). In the case of the Public House, that translation of interests can occur at the site of the writer and readers. An actor-network approach to professional communication that tends to a broader range of actors accounts for the social, political, material, and economic implications of the network. For Myers and Latour, discourse is not as a neutral tool, but is a way of understanding and capturing a moment of reality. Texts are integral to enrolling objects in a network.

Two examples of an actor-network approach to enrollment, on very different scales, are Latour’s door-closer and the Heysham power station. Myers first uses Latour’s example to show that both small and large systems operate through the same complex of enrollment and substitution. Myers sums up Latour’s famous door-closer example:

First, people build walls. But they need doors to get through them. But doors need closing. They could hire a person, a groom, to do this job. But they delegate this job to a machine. Now that the machine is broken, a text must be substituted to enroll the passing door user in closing the door. (13)

On a much larger scale, Myers then demonstrates that the Heysham nuclear power station, though vastly larger and more complex, relies on the same processes of enrollment and substitution as the unassuming door-closer.

The same processes of delegation are going on in the safety system of the Heysham nuclear power plant. Machines are substituted for humans watching, texts substituted for humans directing, organizations speak for individuals; the whole system can be seen as a complex of the human and nonhuman. (14)

Myers states that the plant is not a thing to be represented and separated out from its network, rather “it is an ongoing process of enrollment and disenrollment” (14). Myers’s description of the Heysham station accounts for its materiality, its “thingness” that is often lost in social and cultural studies around the object, as well as for the range of humans and nonhumans. Myers’s and Latour’s work are examples of enrollment and transcription. Actor-network theory could help reflect on human-nonhuman interactions at my research site by accounting for the totality of the material world, rather than focusing solely on the human agent acting in the world.

The fundamental symmetry of actor-network approaches makes it fit well in an analysis of systems like the Public House, involving humans and nonhumans, including texts. However, because of its emphasis on materiality and focus on “political/rhetorical movements of complex heterogeneous networks” (Spinuzzi “Rex” 51), actor-network theory cannot be the only methodology for my site. In fact, its flatness and wide scope exclude human blame, cognition, or failure in favor of an ecological view. For an analysis that re-inserts human agency in the story, I turn to a social theory of genre.

### **Genres: Stabilizing and Generic**

In the case of the Public House, an examination of genres in an actor-network could yield productive insights into group activities where recurring actions of cooperative management take place. Winsor invites us to consider “how a heterogeneous assembly of people can agree upon a

common object and act in concert over time” (“Using” 4). Spinuzzi, Russell, Miller, and Zachry have examined genre, intertextuality, power, and agency in a variety of sites, but the field has not seen a genre study in a cooperative, a site of potentially enormous social capital, where genre as a social action is most poignantly evident, and where one particular text can be imbued with great stabilizing and norming power.

Group behavior is regulated, at least temporarily, through genres, understood as typified social responses to typified social situations (Miller 1984; Winsor 2003, 2007). As such, genres are a stabilizing force or as Catherine Schryer says, “stabilized-for-now” (1994; Winsor “Using” 3). Understanding the social situations genres respond to—and stabilize—is key to investigating networks of power in an organization, even (especially) one that is horizontal like a worker cooperative (Spinuzzi 2007; Winsor 2003).

Genres can be an integral part of an actor-network analysis. Spinuzzi weaves together actor-network theory with activity theory for his analysis in “Who Killed Rex?” Winsor, too, sees the importance of an analysis of genres in examining systems. She writes, “Because they produce stable representations of shifting reality, texts are among the tools used both to create common objects and to coordinate activity over time” (2007, 4). Genres that coordinate the activity of running the Public House include

- Maintaining and controlling inventory, payroll, and finances
- Documenting and maintaining security
- Controlling and maintaining permits and licensing with the city and state
- Contacting members and community partnerships

In addition to enabling an actor-network analysis, a social theory of genre will enable an analysis of the role of power in collective management. This is important because this project will

examine the appropriation of generic workplace genres onto a collective management structure, a structure necessarily relational and social. Collective management might complicate what we have assumed about how genres shape roles and maintain subordinate/superior positions (Winsor 2003). Thus, the adaptation of traditional business genres in a non-hierarchical, decentralized structure might redefine what we think about how business genres order an organization.

One deployment of genre theory is the lens of distributed cognition, knowledge dispersed among people who enable each other's work, who "supplement and support" it (Winsor "Learning" 15). Distributed cognition considers thinking as an act that takes place not completely inside an individual's head, but "that is distributed among the individual, other people, the physical environment, and the tools the person uses, including language and such language structures as genres" (6). Stabilized-for-now genres are fundamental in systems of distributed cognition, which Winsor advocates is the rule in workplaces, rather than the exception (5). In the case of the Public House, examples of distributed cognition include

- Measuring how, when, and by whom tasks are completed
- Measuring and recording behavior, especially in the case of a violation
- Tracking decisions made either by the Workers Collective or Board of Directors
- Tracking attendance in meetings
- Referring back to bylaws and handbooks

In short, in Bitzer's terms, texts respond to a rhetorical situation and because these situations are repeated, a rhetorical response draws on the previous text, and a generic text is developed: "Each text draws on previous texts written in response to similar situations. Through such interaction of texts, genres evolve as recurring" (Devitt 338; Miller 1984). A text is understood as generic when it can be applied to multiple situations, when "[i]t does not seek detailed recreation of the

original encounter between author and audience; rather it seeks to recreate the symbolic context in which the act emerged... (27). These generic texts (genres) stabilize relationships and regulate actions of heterogeneous work groups so they can work together “because texts produce a stable representation of shifting reality” (Winsor “Using” 3). This is why it matters to study genres: they are stable representations that people use to regulate each other and nowhere is this feature more important than in the case of the mutual monitoring that occurs at worker cooperative/collective sites.

Together, texts interact to create a community. Texts that interact with each other might be referential, functional, or generic; the subject may not be another written text, but an oral text. When debating an action, the text, created in collaboration and/or generalized, has authority; “acknowledging the authority of these texts is a prerequisite for membership in the... community.” (Devitt 338, 342, 345, 351, 354). Devitt’s research of intertextuality in a tax accountant firm shows the connected nature of genres in a community.

They form a complex network of interaction, a structured set of relationships among texts, so that any text is best understood within the context of other texts. No text is single, as texts refer to one another, draw from one another, create the purpose for one another. (336)

What Devitt is referring to is “intertextuality,” the interaction of texts “within a single discourse community, a single field of knowledge, and to enable the study of all types of relationships among texts, whether referential, generic, functional, or any other kind” (337).

In a cooperative, negotiations of power happen without a centralized authority while doing business, with a concern for economic viability necessary to survive as a business and to

fulfill a responsibility to membership. Understanding how genres support this activity will help understand the dynamic forces of power and change at the Public House.

### **Participant-Observer**

In addition to the theoretical frameworks listed above, my study also draws from an ethnographic perspective, acknowledging researchers also “participate in the activities they articulate and in the articulation of those activities” (Clark 164). In my case, my participation is complicated because I was hired by the Public House and joined the Workers Collective several years ago. In May of 2013, I was elected by members to serve on the Board of Directors. I am not now nor have I ever been in any supervisory relationship with any Board or Workers Collective members because the supervisory relationship is diffused across several people, as is the practice of mutual monitoring. No one person has real supervisory power over another (except for an elected bar supervisor, which is in turn regulated by the consent of the Workers Collective). However, my position in both the Collective and the Board problematized my relationship with my coworkers and co-directors in two ways. First, they trusted me and my excitement for the project in its early stages may have encouraged them to share information with me they may not have otherwise shared. Second, because of my relationship with coworkers, the fragility of the new cooperative, and the cooperative’s tenuous position as an alternative economic model, negative critique was difficult at times.

The Public House also benefits from my work on this project by receiving a presentation and proposal for recommendations on improving workplace communication and other relevant findings.

## **Social Bonds of Participation**

To understand how participants related to each other and to the neighborhood, I looked to Francesca Polletta's exhaustive study on participation in social movements guided by principles of participatory democracy, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. Polletta analyzed the way people worked together to get important tasks done and make decisions, focusing in part on their relationships with each other in the efficacy of organizing for change. Her work is useful because personal dynamics are very important in a worker cooperative. The greatest problem with worker cooperatives and collectives—and the greatest strength—are the power of personal relationships in the context of a business. Relationships are the bond in this business, so when a relationship is strained, it can affect the business.

In a collective with less formal structures, personal relationships play a much larger role than in a conventional business. Polletta describes these as “relational underpinnings” (18). Personal dynamics plays a role in any organization, but a bureaucracy may more clearly define the roles and boundaries of positions. Within a business built on a different kind of social relationship, eschewing bureaucratic means of authority and leadership, personal relationships have a greater influence on power.

Polletta writes there are three primary social relations of participatory groups: religious fellowships such as the Quakers, tutelage as found in SNCC and early civil rights movements, and friendship as found in SDS and early women's liberation collectives (2002).

Table 1: From Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements. F. Polletta (2002), p. 18

	Features Of Decision Making	How Groups Mitigate Ineffectiveness	How Groups Mitigate Inequality	Examples Of Movement Groups	Potential Sources Of Conflict	When Conflict Is Likely To Emerge
<b>Religious Fellowship</b>	Deferential	Acceptance of authority within the group	Participants are equal before God	Pre- and post-World War II pacifist organization	Resistance to forging new bases of authority	When dissenters invoke the dictates of conscience
<b>Tutelage</b>	Guided	Trust in organizer/tutor	Inequality is sphere specific and diminishing	SNCC, SDS's ERAP, faith-based organizing	Resistance to specifying the ends of action	When movement goals are unclear
<b>Friendship</b>	Informal and intimate	Mutual knowledge and trust	Inequality is counterbalanced by participants' potential, as well as real, skills in other spheres	SDS, SNCC, women's liberation collectives	Exclusiveness and resistance to formalization	When new members join or friendships are otherwise threatened.

On the friendship model in social movements, Polletta writes:

The striking thing about these democracies was the *informal* quality of decision making and its *intimacy*. Discussions were long and spilled out of formal deliberative settings. Decisions were made by informal consensus and tasks were allocated or volunteered for on the basis of a combination of participants' preferences and skills. Often, there was no clear line between allocating and volunteering for tasks. "You do this, I'll do that"—was the standard approach.

(19)

Because of the horizontal structure of the Public House, understanding the relational underpinning of the group becomes very important. In Chapter 3, I argue that the relationships of the people involved in organizing the Public House match Polletta's description of a friendship

model. Her research on the strengths and weaknesses of this model will become important as we untangle the networks that make up the Public House.

## **Design of the Project: Methods**

Because of the unique setting of the Public House and the theories best suited for this kind of study, the methods below proved most useful. I observed staff at work with an opening and closing interview. I studied decision making, accountability, and transparency statements or questions, as well as information transactions via communications technologies. Data collection continued for approximately six months and involved these methods for exploring Workers' Collective communication, training, and practices.

### **Artifact Collection**

In order to understand the kinds of genres the Public House produced and employed, I collected artifacts from the participants that are related to workplace communication and project management, collaboration, information sharing, and training. Artifacts included copies of project to-do lists, anonymized emails, SMS, training documentation, bylaws, handbooks, inventory lists, event notes, and screenshots. To ensure the privacy of others, participants redacted artifacts before turning them over to me.

I analyzed the observation, interview, and artifact data using ethnographic methods.

- Memoing: Starts with, but is not limited to the extant categories of communication, time and project management, understanding, relationships, strategy, and training.
- Visual representations: Activity networks, resource maps, handoff chains, triangulation tables, and topsight tables (Spinuzzi 2013).

- Member checks: I circulated drafts to participants for comments.

## **Textual Analysis**

Using professional communication's appropriation of actor-network theory, I analyzed a variety of collected texts generated by participants. Though a traditional analysis would include a variety of nonhumans, for this project I examined the relationships of textual artifacts and humans, including documents, organizational charts, and images.

## **Site Interviews**

In order to gain insight into people's motives, histories, and activities at the Public House, I conducted five-hour long, in-person, open-ended interviews with past and present staff and members of the Board of Directors. Interviews were audio recorded and analyzed alongside provided documentation.

Interview participants were chosen if they met at least one of the following criteria.

- Employed by Public House for longer than one year.
- Involved in some facet of management.
- Involved in the early developmental stages of the bar.

## **Study Timeline**

- I. **Preliminary Research.** I began preliminary research with background reading on U.S. cooperative theory and history. I focused mostly on U.S. cooperatives because of similarities in cooperative law and culture (i.e., what is true for a cooperative in Italy's famed Emilia Romagna cooperatives may not be true for a cooperative in Milwaukee).

Using internet searches, I collected and reviewed documentation from U.S. cooperative websites. This stage began prior to data collection and continued throughout my study.

II. **Collection.** Stage two included artifact collection, meeting observation, and interviews. This stage also included deciding criteria for interviews and documentation. This stage lasted approximately six months.

III. **Analysis.** I analyzed collected data using ethnographic methods, visualizations, and theoretical frameworks: actor-network theory and genre theory, as well as Polletta's models of participation. This stage continued for approximately one year.

IV. **Findings.** The final stage of this study was writing, revising, circulating, and finally publishing my findings.

## **Participants**

I divided study participants into three groups according to when they became involved in the Public House. My project suggests that when a participant became involved is a key determinant of their experience at the cooperative.

Table 2: Participant groups

	<b>Group A: Founding</b>	<b>Group B: Early Operations</b>	<b>Group C: Middle/Later Operations</b>
<b>Primary Involvement</b>	Involved in formulating original plan and brainstorming structure.	Involved in the initial recruitment and/or during the legitimation with the city of Milwaukee, and through opening	Involved after legitimation with the city
<b>Participant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lucas<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Sean</li> <li>• Sophia</li> <li>• Will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levi</li> <li>• Lucy</li> <li>• Patty</li> <li>• Robert</li> <li>• Shawna</li> <li>• Xavier</li> <li>• Emily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carol</li> <li>• Kyle</li> <li>• Marco</li> <li>• Nadia</li> <li>• Sarah</li> <li>• Dana</li> </ul>

Shown in Table 2, participants were grouped according to when they began to be regularly involved in building the business: attending most of the meetings in a given period, sitting as a director on the Board or the “proto-board,” or working a weekly shift. Workers Collective rules state that an employee must be a participating member of the Workers Collective in order to work more than 12 hours a week. Others may opt-in to the Workers Collective by attending a set number of meetings on a regular basis (“Introduction to New Hires Presentation” 2012.) Group A represents those who were among the earliest participants, where the idea for a cooperative bar

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<sup>3</sup> Name, gender, and other identifying characteristics have been changed.

originated. Group B became involved after the idea for a cooperative bar had gained steam and the earliest organizing efforts were underway, including recruitment and advertising.

Importantly, at the earliest stage, the idea of the “Public House” was still very malleable, even more so than after it became established in the City of Milwaukee’s legal and financial framework. Establishing and organizing the cooperative were still underway, including licensing, fundraising, procuring a building, and other activities that must occur prior to opening the business. Many members of this group participated in transcribing the business through strategic documents, meeting notes, and, with the City of Milwaukee, licenses and bylaws.

Group C represents the last group that came on board after the building was procured and the entity “Public House” had begun to be established in the Riverwest neighborhood and with the City of Milwaukee. For them, there was a ready-made structure to inhabit. At the point of Group C, idiosyncrasies were concretized into practice and had been transcribed. However, because of document ambiguity and with certain members having almost unfettered access to the governance structure of the business, we will see that Group C was also able to enact substantial change at the structural level.

### **Chapter 3: Rhetorical Construction of the Public House: Access, Participation, and Contradictions**

The Public House was a tight assemblage of texts and human actors; the Public House formed—and was formed by—networks. That is, rather than an immutable object, the Public House was in constant flux, recurrently stabilized through temporary links of actors and the genres they employed. The key to understanding the rhetorical processes and the resultant unique

configurations of power at this location is to look at the founding network through an intersection of actor-network theory and genre theory. Actor-network theory is applicable to the study of communication and governance in a cooperative due to its emphasis and considerations of acts of enrollment—the ways humans and nonhumans work together to accomplish tasks and, importantly, build or break linkages. As actor-network theory enables an ecological approach to communication and political disruption at the Public House and incorporates both human and nonhuman agency, genre theory allows us to follow the texts to better understand not only the “what” of transcription and enrollment, but the “how” (Latour 1992, 1999; Mara and Hawk 2010; Myers 1996; Potts 2010; Spinuzzi 2007). In this section, I argue that the network was initially stabilized through genre activity; I show how evolution/dissolution of networks and genres played a role in creating the tensions between democratic participation and exclusivity that come to play in Chapter 4.

### **Founding Network: Stabilized through Texts**

In a cooperatively owned business in which group agreements are fundamental to its viability, genres played a central role in creating and stabilizing the business. Like all organizations, cooperatives are by nature social structures, built and sustained by human linkages enrolled together, where stability in the form of either hierarchy or genres are necessary. Despite the service industry’s high turnover rates and a Board of Directors elected to staggered terms each year, workplace texts and a constituency of long-term participants stabilized and cohered the group, establishing genres that outlined group behavior with goals, rules, and roles.

## **The Shape of Genres**

The initial organizers used many texts to enroll actors into the Public House network in order to complete tasks, hold the group together, and accomplish their common goal; access to these texts was key to employing the governing structures touted by the Public House. For example, one distinct genre organizers have since recognized as essential to the early efforts is a mind-map of sticky notes. People wrote their ideas for how to structure the business on sticky notes. Participants grouped similar ideas together. In this way, the group collaboratively organized the structure of the cooperative.

The use of this tool reflects the grassroots organizing background of the founders, but also their method of solving conflicts.

...there was one meeting in particular where I facilitated it and came up with a tool during the meeting to help get us, to help figure out what the structure and organization of the actual collective and business was going to be. And so how I lead that meeting was we had a whole bunch of sticky notes and markers and we had been talking about it for months and so people had this idea in their heads of how this would work... people just wrote down each component or idea that they had for the Public House on different little sticky notes. And then we grouped all of the similar ones together and that's how we mapped out that we would have a workers collective and then we'd have membership, we'd have the publicity/marketing side, which at that point we called propaganda... and the product of that is how we came up with the manifesto, which was really helpful to get us all on a similar page. (Sean)

An interview with Patty reiterated the usefulness and lasting impact of this genre.

There was a time when, we were like, “Okay, what all do we have to do?” There would be conversation, conversation, conversation... it was frustrating. Sean brought out like big pieces of paper and stuck them on the walls... And started visualizing it and it was, “That’s how you do this.” Seeing him do that, being able to, it’s a good thing to learn, when the group’s at an impasse, trying to make decisions and it’s very clear what decisions need to be made, but how to make them is unclear, or what they should be is unclear, that exercise of visualizing it for everyone so that conversation is clearly on a wall. (Patty)

Sean’s collaborative activity is common in grassroots organizing to bring the group into agreement (see [toolsforchange.org](http://toolsforchange.org)). The use of deliberative technologies is common in facilitation techniques like the Art of Hosting (Sandfort and Quick 5); however, it is unique that this tool was used to collaboratively make *business* decisions.

Genres like this organizing tool was essential in the earliest stages of development where the Public House was a kind of horizontal utopia. Collaborative and participatory, the network hung together by their enrollments, including the recognition that using Sean’s tool together they had decided on the structure. While no one individual may have received 100% of what they wanted in through the process, enough people were satisfied that the group could agree and move beyond the impasse that Patty and Sean recalled.

The use of the sticky notes and other tools show how genres evolved to create shared realities to enroll actors and establish links that held the group together (Winsor 2007). Applying a social approach to genres provides a framework for analysis of the role of texts in this “hanging together.” That is, looking at genres as social responses to typified social situations that are

stabilized-for-now shows that the genres they created were a response to the recurring situation of impasse and stabilized the group for coordinated action (Miller 1984; Winsor 2003, 2007). Organizational documents like manifestos, bylaws, and codes of conduct steadied the founding network long enough to open the business.

The texts they created came to serve the group through interpretive processes. Almost as immediately as they had begun, they realized that though they each started with a dream, it may not have been a collective, shared dream. As Sean's tool demonstrates, the genres they created enabled the group to move past their disagreements and open the business, but these disagreements did not disappear. Rather, they became embedded in the genres they were creating, which were in turn enrolled in the founding network.

### **The Shape of the Network**

This founding network of Public House was responsible for imprinting not only the shape of the organization, but also the kinds of genres they would employ. Human actors in the first network (Group A in Table 1) were not entrepreneurs or even experienced bartenders. Sean and Will's accounts of this network show many of the founding members were community organizers and their grassroots organizing background influenced the initial strategies for opening the bar—grassroots broadly defined as people without expertise, organizing from the bottom-up. That is, rather than starting the business with a conventional strategy of feasibility studies, market research, and start-up funds, Patty, Levi, Lucy, and Sean each recounted the earliest organizing texts from the DIY genre: flyering, knocking on neighbors' doors, word-of-mouth, and personal outreach.

These earliest organizing efforts showed individuals enrolled into the founding network by social and political interests, linked through a narrative threading through Riverwest by neighbors, signs, artwork, meetings, potluck dinners, and other institutions. According to Sean, from the beginning, “it was more than just opening up a bar... it was this broader goal of using that to then fund other initiatives, organizations, projects...” That the business would be socially conscious is significant to understanding the motivations of the original founding group; that is, they were creating a business founded on a commitment to shared ownership and open, democratic participation.

These founding volunteers brought a particular expertise in organizing and quickly took on tasks like fundraising, drafting documents for the city, finding and securing a location, and capitalizing on volunteer labor. According to Levi and Robert, this social expertise coupled with their commitment to building a non-hierarchical collective led to a looser structure at the cost of ensuring certain important texts like employee wage guidelines or procedures were created at the start or within the first year of operation.

While this co-op eventually opened as the Public House, it was not always sure the new cooperative would in fact be a bar. When asked about the beginning, Patty said,

... We decided to start a co-op and then we were like, “What kind of co-op?”  
What? “I want to start a business? What should it be?” is not a good way to start a business. Nobody ever in a million years would do that as a sole proprietor... You would never be like, “I want to start a business, now what should I become an expert at?”

The organizers initially considered many businesses, including, according to Will, a bakery. However, Levi and Sean both said that once the idea of a bar was proposed (and the stories are

contradictory as to who and how it was first suggested) as a “fast way to make a lot of money,” it took off and other ideas were dropped. Levi, Patty, and Will agree the reason the bar idea took off was because it could be started with very little overhead beyond rent, licenses, and initial inventory, whereas a bakery would require significant start-up money for ovens and other equipment and “could possibly take years to turn a profit” (Will).

Initially, the group of friends used a variety of methods to enroll other actors from the neighborhood into the Public House network. Sean and Robert referred to the founding network members as a steering committee while Levi called it a proto-board. Whatever the term, unlike conventional entrepreneurs, this network did not enroll business experts, but rather invited residents of Riverwest using several grassroots organizing strategies to fundraise and to gather participants, publicly marketing their idea that people without expertise could actualize an organization to their own advantage. For example, Lucy happened to overhear a conversation at another cooperative in the neighborhood where she was working.

I was working at the co-op in the food cafe at the time... (Sophia) was talking with someone else who was in the cafe and then she was like, oh yeah we are starting to talk about opening a co-op bar. And I was like, “Co-op bar? That’s awesome. When do you meet?” And she said the first meeting is literally the next day... I thought it sounded interesting and was there to overhear the conversation.

Lucy’s involvement at an established cooperative positioned her as a candidate for enrollment in the new project. Importantly, she was not asked about her commitment, her skill set, or whether or not she could make a capital investment into the business. Rather, she was invited to participate because of her proximity and experience of working in a cooperative. Similarly, Levi

and his partner were invited to participate because they lived next to a business owned by one of the early organizers and expressed interest in cooperative development.

Along with invitation, people became involved because of guerrilla marketing. Robert became interested through a neighborhood poster.

The way I remember first learning about it was through a poster that was just hanging up on the street... And it was just a call to meet, which I thought was a really cool thing. Because I love co-ops but also because it was a new thing to get people into a room. As opposed to a particular kind of targeted invitation or more formal, that it was informal and everyone was invited.

As these accounts show, the group did not enlist actors through orthodox means—by targeted recruiting efforts or invitations to experts—but rather through community organizing tactics. The underlying belief, according to Patty and Lucas, was that experts were not needed, but that through community knowledge, “looking around,” and “Google searches,” they could locate the necessary resources and knowledge to open a cooperative. Importantly, posters, often hand-painted and tacked to a lamppost or taped in a window, invited a particular type of participant, one who:

- Lived or traveled through the neighborhood on foot, bike, or skateboard (cars would move too fast to read the signs in the window)
- Possessed some experience or interest in cooperatives and cooperative development
- Had time or interest in developing a cooperative in the neighborhood

Emblematic of the do-it-yourself focus of the earliest network, these posters resemble advertising for punk shows or other events scattering the Riverwest landscape. Use of this kind of artifact to drum up support for the project is an example of how the Public House sought and welcomed a

*particular type of participant*—the neighbor and the cooperator—and then together constructed Public House within the neighborhood of Riverwest. The collected data does not date back far enough to adequately examine the intention behind early recruiting, but what efforts like the posters and word-of-mouth point to—at least in these instances—is an early shaping of a network through targeted enrollment, selective inclusion.

Levi, Lucy, Lucas, Sean, and Patty described the early group as loosely organized, though not necessarily a group of friends, although there were friends in the group. Importantly, this group was not a monolithic group, but heterogeneous and linked together for a variety of reasons, with varying backgrounds and levels of expertise, as well as diverse—and sometimes competing—goals and motivations. Eventually, these differences grew to manifest themselves in the texts they produced.

## **The Myth of the Public House: Exclusionary Practice Meets Democratic Principles**

While the Public House deployed the language of democracy in its workplace documents, publicizing the workplace as a horizontal, democratic space in which individual autonomy was encouraged, in practice, this promise fell short for some. In some ways, the organizers fell short of living up to its promise because of failures in the texts—not necessarily through any one individual’s fault, but because the nature of the social arrangements present from the beginning was reified in the texts they produced and the kinds of genres they employed. Interviews, observations, and analyses show individual predictions and perceptions of the values and mission fell short of what genres were doing in practice. Meeting notes from a board training session in 2013 put open decision-making at the heart of what made the Public House a cooperative:

What makes this a co-op?

Member-owned

Participation in governance (expected, and as a benefit)

Decision-making by many, rather than one or a small few

Democratic participation in decision making (*Board of Directors*)

The capacity to participate in governance was integral to how people defined the Public House for themselves and marketed it to others. Nevertheless, this broad participation was largely a myth operationalized to move participants into productive consent, not because of nefarious aims, but because the relational nature of the Public House led to a lack of formalized mechanisms which could ensure access.

As in many organizations, workplace genres at the Public House were socially constructed and continually reinterpreted. However, what made genres at the Public House unique was that a broader range of a limited subset of actors had textual access to governance; that is, some individuals freely created and interpreted genres, and this access translated into an ability to respond to—and even enact—change in the network.

For example, while employed there as a bouncer, I grew unhappy with the position and decided to propose a new job description with greater responsibilities, while asking for a change in the wage: from a flat minimum wage to a higher wage, plus a percentage of tips. Using a traditional business communication genre (a formal proposal), my idea worked its way from an employee meeting to the Board for approval within a month's time. My position as an insider granted me this access and the agency to write and circulate a proposal, bringing about organizational change. While theoretically, anyone *could* do the same, my position in the network created the conditions for me to feel I had an ability or even a right to do so.

Textual access was purportedly open to all participants. Everyone formally involved (as employees, long-term volunteers, or directors) had open access to all governing documents—including all meeting notes—with editing permissions in Google Drive. In practice, however, fewer had the ability to change systems as the delineations of *who* could posit change was unclear in the documentation, instead prescribed by group norms. This is the heart of the contradiction: while the ability to access governance through genres seemed open to anyone, genre access was actually limited. Regardless, people continued to share the message of open governance with new workers upon hire, from the Board of Directors, through literature, and in meetings (including worker meetings, board meetings, and joint board and employee meetings). While founders and early employees accessed a robust network of people, genres, places, governance, etc., outsiders may have found it difficult to affect change. In other words, while employees, founders, members, and the marketing materials publicized the Public House as a porous, democratic system in which an individual could “own their work,” newcomers may have found it difficult to break through. The Public House was a very tight material and textual assemblage, and for those without access, enacting change—and perhaps meaningful participation in decision-making—may have been more difficult. If a new employee had attempted to re-write her job description as I had, she may have discovered she did not have the same ability to act. In this way, access may have been problematic for newcomers.

As I seek to understand power at the Public House, I turn again to my research questions:

1. How does a cooperative employ genres differently?
2. What do these texts tell us about how power is distributed in a cooperative?
3. How do the genres it employs affect organizational change?

One way this cooperative employed genres differently is that many people had textual access to the governance of the business, *but only some people*. In and of itself, this limitation is not unique. However, in this case, this limitation matters for two reasons: 1) the Public House positions itself as an open, democratic workplace where *all* people can openly participate; and 2) people gave up other rewards in exchange for this democratic promise. While deploying rhetorics of empowerment, the Public House created minimum wage jobs on the basis that employees would be empowered to shape their job and own the directions of the business. At times, a contradiction existed between the stated values and the material realization of those values in individual lives.

The practical limitation of access was a byproduct of the relational foundation of the network. Understanding how people enrolled in the network related to each other *through* the genres they have available or have created will help me to understand how textual access translated into power, in service to Question 2: What do these texts tell us about how power distributed in a cooperative organization? This allows me to explore the tension between democracy and exclusivity: e.g., one way power was distributed was through network positions enabled and constrained by genre access.

In the sections below, I untangle the founding network—to use Spinuzzi’s metaphor (2007)—that made up the Public House in order to answer my research questions. First, I examine how friendship among founders and early members created a stabilized and exclusive network. Second, I look at an instantiation of their collaboration through genres. Finally, I tangle the pieces back together to look at the creation of the Public House as an assemblage of these two conditions.

## **Relational Underpinning Affected Textual Access**

Understanding how people related to each other will help me to understand how power is configured through the genres people created. Because an array of actors had access to governance documents and procedures, how these actors related to each other profoundly shaped how people accessed the Public House network. Applying Polletta's theories of participation and drawing from her examples, I argue the participants at the Public House primarily related as friends and that the exclusionary nature of friendship was built into the workplace genres they created/interpreted.

The way people related to each other profoundly affected the way they wrote and used texts, most notably the lack of formal mechanisms like policies and procedures. In the case of the Public House, if a friendship model of relationship was baked into the governance structure, then an already porous structure became even more permeable. There are at least two properties of this configuration at the Public House: informal, invisible power and the (inadvertent) exclusion of newcomers.

Baldacchino and Hoffman locate two kinds of power that can operate in a cooperative like the Public House: informal and formal networks. Hoffman defines formalized power as an attribute of the job description, easily locatable and delimited.

Formal position attributes characterize a job and its associated activities. Informal network connections comprise worker-made alliances throughout an organization (Kanter 1979). For example, position attributes might empower a dispatcher to set fellow workers' staffing schedules; network connections might enable a cab driver to learn the priorities of the as-yet-unwritten monthly agenda. The former is

overt, easier to identify, and acknowledged by the organization's members. The latter is more covert, less obvious, and invisible to some members. (55)

The Public House was made of these informal networks of power with few formalized positions. Group norms, rather than formalized roles, dictated roles and rules. Some individuals were empowered to direct operations over others, even while the organization was ostensibly horizontal. For example, during my study, the mission statement was discovered to have changed. The change was noticed when the "old" mission statement appeared on an organizational document instead of the "new." I could not find records of the re-writing procedures or conversation. Some individuals felt empowered to take autonomous action, while others did not, and who could take this kind of action was not outlined in the documentation.

Murphy references to this blurring of lines between autonomous and consensus-based decision-making in the early meetings of the Public House.

The meetings were pragmatic and featured consensus-based decision making wherever possible. At the same time, as cooperators assigned duties amongst themselves, they were explicit in stating that committees and board members should feel autonomous enough to make decisions that affected the whole enterprise, and their judgment would be trusted. These dual processes of autonomous decision-making and consensus-based decision-making were important to streamline the development of the enterprise. (41)

Murphy mentions the lack of formalizing certain measures and the trust that allowed individuals to work autonomously: "Interestingly, the cooperators did not discuss in detail what differentiated an autonomous decision or a group decision, but to my knowledge this did not cause any problems" (41). The genres they were creating together lacked procedures, not needed

for people who were mostly friends or at least friendly. This lack of discussion on what necessitated autonomy or consensus indicates the informality in the network being built into the genres they produced (18). For example, for most of the Public House's existence, there was no employee handbook, or a formal vacation or absence policy.

At an organizational level, while the lack of mechanisms enabled some to act autonomously, the lack of formalized mechanisms and roles made discipline and accountability difficult. An example of this difficulty was the failure to intervene in disruptive behavior during meetings. One meeting I observed became quite heated. Feelings were hurt and the conversation circuitously devolved into bickering and side talk. People showed signs of frustration like eye rolling and exchanging glances. One director put her head in her hands (Observation Notes 4/12/14). Disruptions and communication breakdowns like this example were not frequent, but common enough that it was not an anomaly. Even though this behavior was clearly disruptive to the group and the majority of the attendees were visibly frustrated, no one individual felt empowered to stop it. The agency to step into a dispute and disruption to the Board agenda was missing. Perhaps this absence was because of a diffusion of responsibility, linked in some way back to the way the group designed their governing texts, lacking formal mechanisms of control and roles. The deployment of social capital affected the direction of the organization, and, as shown in the incident above, directly influenced board outcomes.

Employees often relied on their network positions and enrollments to blur the lines of compulsory action. For example, employees and directors often used the phrase "volen-tell" (to request someone to volunteer for a task, implying a lack of choice). One example of the volen-tell network is the organizing of a large event, a Kentucky Derby party. Will asked, "Marco, will you have it clean and open at 10 am?" Marco says, "Yes." Someone else asks, "Who is making

the flyer?” Ideas for the flyer then come from a few different people until the group decides on a design. A worker asks Dana to design the flyer and the tickets, and then ask the group, “Can you work a 9-hour shift if you come in at 1? Carol, can you stay late?” While Carol and Dana were free to say no, the capacity to ask for such a task was an example of unequal power distribution within the network.

The informal friendship-unfolding of the network resonates with Polletta’s description of SDS and women’s liberation collectives. Problems that arise because of this kind of power distribution in the organizations Polletta studies also arise in the Public House. Polletta points to the primary instability of a friendship basis, which is not that it may be destabilized if friendships go sideways, but that friendship is necessarily exclusive.

If friendship supplies the trust, mutual affection, and respect that facilitate fast and fair decisions, it also makes it difficult to expand the deliberative group beyond the original circle. Newcomers lack an understanding of the history of issues at stake as well as the idiosyncratic practices of this organization. Veterans may fail to inform or consult them. But newcomers' lack is affective as well as informational... they may find it difficult to secure the trust, respect, and solicitude that veterans enjoy. (140)

The exclusionary qualities of friendship *enabled* a reliance on unspoken norms and etiquette in the absence of formalized roles that Murphy references, a quality that can undermine newcomers’ attempts to gain textual access to governance documents. While the language and the structures were there, how exactly to act and to access those structures may remain a mystery.

Despite the problems of exclusivity and diffusion of responsibility, after first organizing around friendship, reorganizing around something more formal can present difficulties, straining the unique bonds that made the organization successful in the first place, bonds that had become the foundation of decision-making and agreement (151-152). Difficulty in reorganization becomes more pressing as organizations grow, founders or experienced employees leave, and newcomers take their place. As we see in the next chapter, in the case of the Public House, broad network and generic textual change was possible only through disruption and upheaval.

Polletta suggests that the exclusionary nature of friendship inevitably leads to fighting, stultification, and inaction (4). As we see in the Public House, the friendship model indeed precipitated many complications, compromises, and contradictions, perhaps ultimately undercutting many of the values the business was originally founded on.

### **Textual Access Affected Participation**

One of my guiding questions was to find out how cooperatives employ genres differently from a conventional business. My study shows that in the case of the Public House, genres acted both as gatekeepers and as points of access by which some individuals could participate in governing the business.

According to Winsor, “Texts function not only to record and share what is already known but, perhaps more importantly, to help writers and readers generate and agree on what counts as knowledge” (“Learning” 5). In the case of Public House, the question is not only what counts as knowledge, but also what counts as acceptable practice, how these decisions were made, and how they shaped the texts created. While many genres and authorized texts were created to fulfill the requirements of the state, in response to incidents, or to transfer knowledge, they lacked

official documentation outlining roles and means of decision making. Whatever the reason, by neglecting to create official mechanisms and texts that formalized how individuals could access the governance structures, they legitimized invisible, informal power negotiated through group norms, leaving newcomers and outsiders without access.

During my study, they continually referenced the texts they had created. For instance, I witnessed more than one occurrence where a member of the board asked what the bylaws say about a particular issue, and another member pulled them up, looked them over, and read them aloud to the group. During meetings, volunteers or the secretary took exhaustive, detailed notes and, post-decision, another member wrote the account in a “Decisions Made” file. These texts recirculated for other uses as they pointed back to a decision, conversation, or negotiation.

One example of how textual access translated into access to power at the Public House is the use of Google Drive for note taking. During meetings, people often toggled between Google Drive and the verbal conversation. I observed more than one instance of participants writing to each other in the open document or texting about what is happening in the meeting, in private off-the-record chats. Friends talked to each other and made private observations outside the deliberations or even the knowledge of the group. Such observations and comments may have affected actions of the participants without knowledge of the rest of the group, problematizing the notion of consensus.

This kind of side-chat alongside the authorized conversation was observed on several occasions. For instance, when the Board decided to fire an individual, Patty and I took notes. Patty blurted out the person was fired in what I thought was a harsh tone. I typed into the Google Doc something along the lines of, “Hey, ease up on it a bit” to let him down easy. Patty changed her behavior—the way she talked to the individual *as* the voice of the Public House—because of

my private comment, but no one else at the meeting besides us were aware I had even said anything. While technically anyone at the meeting could have logged in and participated in the note-taking, not everyone had a laptop or felt empowered to act. In this manner, access to Google Drive or group SMS threads enabled collaboration among select people, while those without it were left with only “authorized” messages.

The incident report is another example of how textual access translated into the ability to act and affect change. A response to a perceived lack of accountability, the incident report was a flexible, open document created for reporting events that were deemed unacceptable by a worker or board member about other workers, board members, volunteers, patrons, or any individual that came into contact with the bar (Figure 4). The Board of Directors created it in response to a complaint. The incident report now hangs above the record player, near the laptop, a physical artifact circumscribing the reporter.

As other genres created at the Public House, the incident report functioned in some ways like Winsor’s work orders in *Writing Power*. The incident report was an example of how those with textual access may affect change. Winsor described how work orders “jointly endorsed interpretations, came to represent facts” (61). Through the incident report, an event was rhetorically constructed for those with the capital to act upon it. Notes from the meeting that resulted in the creation of the incident report show it was created to monitor the bar. The intention behind the incident report was informative about problems at the bar, including drunken or disruptive behavior: “We don’t want to have a policy of no drinking at the bar, but maybe we could put together what we find acceptable... If the WC can’t police themselves, [then] we are in a funny spot because we are directly responsible for the bar but not day to day operations.” Also, sound and door workers should be able to make incident reports, that

“incident report should be anonymous and emailed,” and “stuff people say in community should also be filed. It should be anonymous, not punitive” (*Special Meeting*).

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Incident Report--- Suggested Format</b></p> <p>Please email the following to <a href="mailto:workersrwph@googlegroups.com">workersrwph@googlegroups.com</a></p> <p><b>What kind of incidents need reporting:</b> harassment, violence of any type, theft, incidents where the bar can be held legally liable, physical damage to building, any time police are called to us, any crime that happens here even if police are not called, any other incident the workers collective wants people to know</p> <p><b>Time frame:</b> Within 24 hours of the incident. Immediately contact (phone or text) President of the Board and Vice-President of the Board if the incident is VERY serious or an emergency.</p> <p>What happened?</p> <p>Who was involved?</p> <p>Here's what we did at the time:</p> <p>This is what we are going to do about it in (x) days:</p> <p>Follow-up coming in (x) days:</p> <p><i>Presiding President of the Board is responsible for tracking down a follow-up if it is not forthcoming.</i></p> <p><i>*Please note: this report is intended to empower the workers collective to handle incidents within the context of the moment according to their own proven good-judgment and trust-worthiness. The report is not intended to invite en masse decision-making. However, individuals should feel empowered to voice a dissenting opinion on how a situation was/ will be handled.</i></p> <p>July 23, 2013</p>
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Figure 2: Incident Report

Here is an example of a filed report:

What happened?

*A large brawl outside of the Public House around 1 AM...*

Who was involved?

*Almost everyone that was inside Public House that night. Nobody is sure how it started, but it involved patrons, performers, (organizers), and staff interfered*

What we did at the time:

*Carol, on door, was the first outside to try to diffuse the situation. Sophia and I noticed upwards of 20 people all exit the bar at once, and Sophia immediately ran outside while I tended to the bar. I was trying to stop people from rushing outside, knowing it would escalate whatever situation was happening outside... Sophia, Carl, and... were outside trying to break up the fight. It was an unmanageable amount of people. I attempted to call the cops from inside, but our neighbors beat me to it...*

This is what we are going to do:

*Sophia, Carol, and I do not want Tuesdays to stop happening. We all think it is really important to have this type of event at the Public House. We came up with a few ideas to prevent things like this from happening:*

*Hold a special meeting with Carl and Mel about why they want to be involved with Public House. Pinpoint whether they just want it to be a party for them each week, or if they want to be involved with the community building aspect...*

(“Incident Report”)

By framing the report with blanks for “what we did at the time” and “what we are going to do about it,” the incident report encouraged participants to narrativize the incident, granting agency to the individual making the report. The incident report itself listed the Worker Collective Google group as the intended recipient (a group that the Board of Directors can read and participate in as well). However, in practice, documents may be emailed to either the Board of Directors as a whole or to a singular individual perceived to have power to act upon it, typically a director, but at times, it could be an individual acting in a managerial capacity. The incident report could have resulted in an investigation leading to disciplinary action, though neither of these outcomes is prescribed in the incident report itself.

Because no mechanisms existed, individuals in the Collective needed a way for complaints to be formalized and acted upon. Mutual monitoring (Cheney 1995) necessitated a transcribed interpretation that could enact a certain event (investigation by powerful individuals). In lieu of an authorized point person to convey the story, this narrative was necessary to create a shared reality among those with access to it.

One example of the way an incident report creates a shared reality is when an individual stole an item from the bar. The security camera video and witnesses recorded the misconduct. Like Winsor’s work order, it was the incident report that rendered the misconduct material, translating it to textual form upon which the Board of Directors could act. Once an action was inscribed, it gained a reality that can be acted upon by the Board (Latour 1999; Winner 1986). Latour addresses this phenomenon of translation in *Pandora’s Hope*. He writes:

It seems that reference is not simply the act of pointing or a way of keeping on the outside, some material guarantee for the truth of a statement; rather it is our way of keeping something *constant* through a series of transformations. Knowledge

does not reflect a real external world that it resembles via mimesis, but rather a real interior world, the coherence and continuity of which it helps to ensure. (58)

A chain of enrollments and inscriptions lent reality to a moment that previously no board member was aware of; it might as well not have existed. However, the word of witness + video + incident report gave the moment a reality that was hard to ignore. The incident report was a social action because it inscribed an event, giving the report exigency.

The incident report is one of many genres created at the Public House: a response to a need. It formalized mutual monitoring into generic procedure and, most importantly, formalized unequal access to give the report, and to respond to it. The incident report, which I was a part of creating, was the first step toward formalizing hierarchy at the Public House.

## **Chapter 4: Dream and Death of a Dream: Rearrangement of an Organization through Rhetorical Strategy**

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how compromises reified in the texts they produced together—texts most notable for their lack of prescriptions—opened the way for informal, invisible power for some and lack of access for others. In this chapter, I continue my examination of the Public House networks and the genres they instituted, extending my analysis from the relationships of the founding network to the genres they employed; contradictions and

tensions present in these original genres erupted into a full re-arrangement of the Public House network<sup>4</sup>.

During my study, I witnessed changes that resulted in dramatic alteration of the structure of the Public House. To patrons and members, it may have appeared as if nothing had changed, but the organization had changed dramatically over a short period, so much so that the business may have been unrecognizable to those involved at the beginning. Individuals empowered by their textual access to governance documents enacted sweeping structural, network changes. Power shifted, from diffused power enabled by broad-yet-limited textual access, to a combination of these documents and—most importantly—power became vested in a particular network position: a manager. That is, rewriting organization documents alone did not resolve tensions, but rather change came by rewriting genres and by collectively instituting a new position who embodied this compromise. This change occurred by way of a handful of empowered individuals with textual access able to enact changes in network articulation, which resulted in significant philosophical and practical organizational changes, changes that ultimately brought the organization toward solvency.

Because of the friendship relational model of the Public House covered in Chapter 3, documentation was informal, lacked protocols, and allowed for wide interpretation of procedures, opening the way for unequal distribution of power. The documentation the initial group of organizers produced enacted a compromise from two incommensurable philosophical perspectives of cooperative development: self-managed collectivity grounded in concern for autonomy, and procedural accountability grounded in concern for transparency and equitability.

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<sup>4</sup> Key details of these events have been changed or removed to better protect anonymity and to keep the focus on structural network concerns, rather than individual actors.

For example, in order to coordinate varying motives and values around labor, they created a genre called the Manifesto. At least partially a representation of their negotiation of differences, the Manifesto helped situate the Workers Collective within the Public House network; however, the Manifesto failed to resolve the two conflicting positions.

Over time, the incommensurability of these positions developed into a rupture in the network, near insolvency, and finally, in a moment of top-down authority, a re-organization of the workers by the Board of Directors. The Board instituted a new managerial position, shifting the burden of negotiation between collectivity and the need for procedure, from a document to an individual. This new manager's first act was to enroll a new prescriptive genre: an employee handbook, which superseded the Manifesto. Ultimately, these changes led to a showdown between the two perspectives, dramatized between a stalwart of the collectivity faction against the new managerial position. In the end, the new managerial model—with a stronger network and more actors enrolled—won out.

Because of their access to governance, certain empowered individuals could pivot the business in a very short time. This unfettered access by a few resulted in a nimble organization, a quality ultimately responsible for its survival, even while compromising original intent of full democratic participation.

## **Conflicts in Structuring the Public House: The Manifesto**

In this section, I examine the two incommensurable positions on cooperative development and their disagreements on how the Public House should be structured. In an effort to reach a compromise and coordinate action, they enrolled a document to concretize their areas of agreement. Called the Manifesto, this document failed to resolve at least two issues: their

reliance on momentum and friendship rather than stability, and the problem of the distribution of labor in the new network.

### **Foundational Split: Two Perspectives at Odds**

The unequal access we saw in Chapter 3 was largely due to ambiguous documentation lacking formal mechanisms, enabling invisible power networks to flourish at the expense of access and transparency. Here, I argue divisions in the founding network present at the beginning were ultimately to blame for this lack of formal mechanisms that allowed exclusionary practices to be concretized into organizational texts. These divisions were the result of divergent viewpoints on how the Public House should be structured.

Interviews reveal at least two visions of ethics on structure. The first group of individuals shared an organizing philosophy rooted in the do-it-yourself culture of the neighborhood. When asked why more deliberate management mechanisms were not put in place at the beginning of the bar or why expertise was not sought, Patty ascribed it to a DIY ethic along the lines of grassroots activism, punk music, basement shows, zines, and anti-consumerism.

The point of anything is to do it. You don't need to ask permission to do things; you don't need necessarily to have any expertise... Coming out of that sort of cultural space and going into "How are we going to actualize a democratic economy? What does that look like? Do we need experts? Hell no we don't." That's the attitude. Like, "Let's start a co-op. Okay, what kind of co-op? Let's start a bar. Alright, let's do it."

Robert and Levi agree with Patty when she identified a DIY ethic with an anarchist attitude, the heart of which is an undaunted belief in self-management. As this DIY ethic is antithetical to

conventional management expertise, and more in line with anarcho-syndicalist self-management as discussed in Chapter 1, I will refer to this model for business management as “self-management” for shorthand.

Sean, Robert, Lucy, and Patty also identified a second position was from some of the people with organizing and/or cooperative experience, who were familiar with the strictures of running an organization and who had previously helped build or manage a cooperative. This second position is responsible for what has been referred to by Robert and Levi as “process:” enrolling into the founding network a range of procedural genres including transcriptions, organization charts, governance calendars and other texts associated with the formal process and structuring techniques. Individuals in this group had been involved in a range of organizing efforts, from environmental and social issues to cooperative info-shops, housing, and policy efforts. They brought theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience to the foundational network of the Public House. I refer to this party as “process-oriented.”

Texts created during the founding meetings enacted tensions between these two approaches. The best example is the text entitled “Manifesto.” By naming it a type of political declaration in militaristic typeface on the cover, the authors frame their project as political and radical. A look inside, however, shows a rather conventional business document, save for the “Propaganda Committee,” a tongue-in-cheek label revealing members saw this document as promoting a particular political perspective with street militancy.

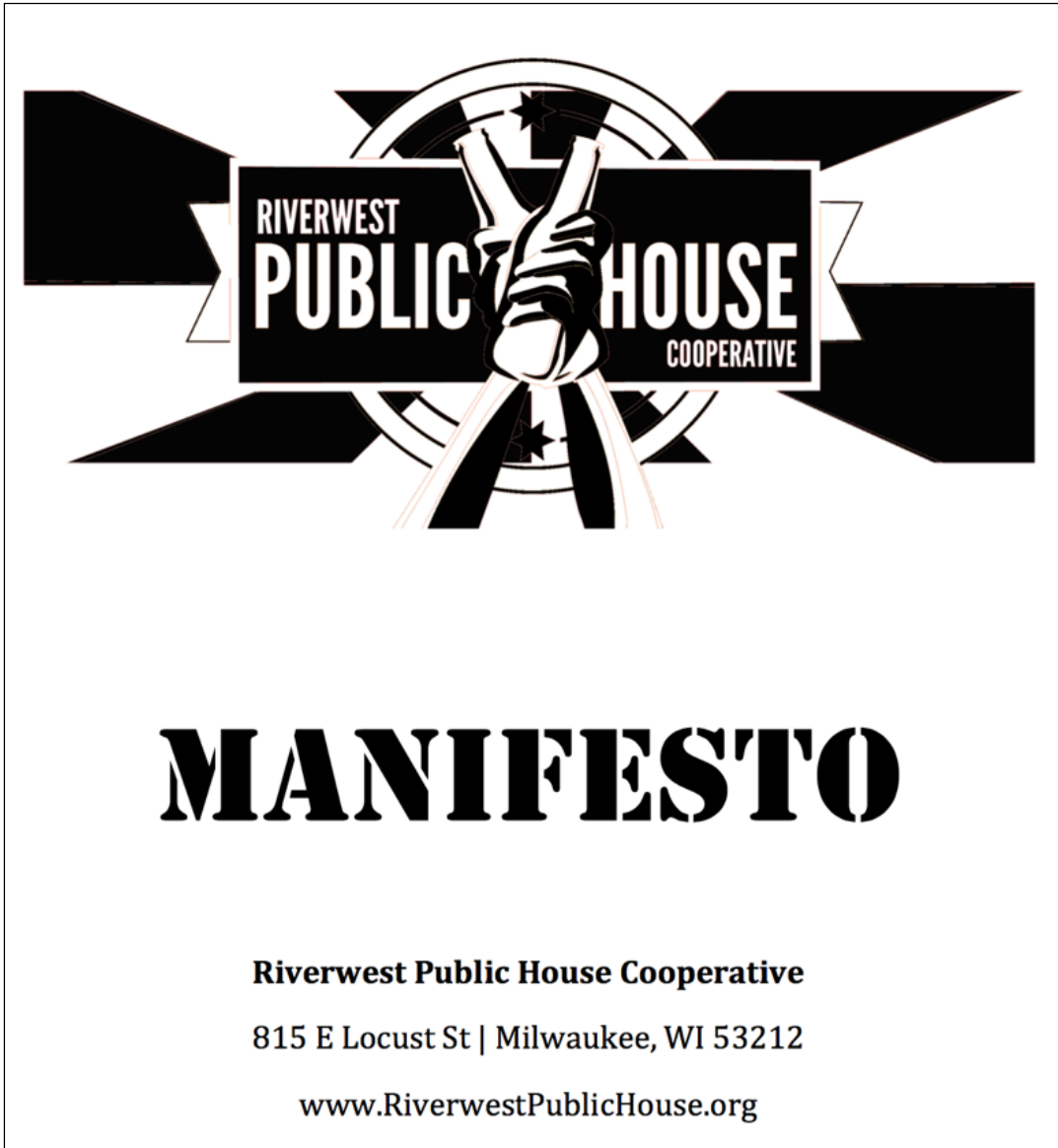


Figure 3: Cover of Manifesto

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. Mission Statement & Slogan
2. By-Laws
3. Articles of Incorporation
4. Organizational Structure
5. Membership
6. Board of Directors
7. Workers' Collective
8. Standing Committees
9. Finance Committee
10. Membership Committee
11. Human Resources Committee
12. Building Committee
13. Propaganda Committee
14. 2010 – 2011 Budget

Figure 4: Table of Contents

In stark tension to the radicalism conveyed by the cover, opening the Manifesto reveals the Table of Contents. The reader encounters a conventional, standardized demarcation of topics, structural and budgetary in nature, documents that enabled the compromise toward collaboration and coordinated action, according to Sean whose sticky notes tool resulted in the Manifesto.

The Manifesto reified the tensions between the self-management faction and the process-oriented faction. Beyond the cover, the document reveals what people believed they were making: a well-organized activist organization for some, and a political DIY project for others. The resulting document is a compromise between the two.

Interviewees reported some organizers left as the cost of compromise became too great, but many who were bothered viewed the document as a concession they could work with. Ultimately, however, it was a fantasy of collaboration. Given the disciplinary problems inherent in the informal structure and the incommensurability of the two philosophies, noticeably missing was anything along the lines of regulatory measures, perhaps because discipline was too contentious of a point and brought to light the ruptures in the framework most clearly, leaving the organizers unable to reconcile.

In contrast to Murphy's description of the first organizing meetings (41), Sean, Robert, and Levi recounted how often the opposing organizers clashed as the self-management philosophy butted against formalization and implementation of configuring mechanisms. Self-management advocates saw those elements as domestication and contrary to worker autonomy. At moments of conflict, the self-management group would often win due to vocal and intractable positions, according to interviews with Sean, Robert, and Lucy. In interviews, process-focused organizers pointed out times they made concessions in an effort to focus on the necessary actions at hand, like buying a license, dealing with the property owner, etc. In these moments, practical

details took precedence over less immediate but perhaps equally important decisions like attendance policies or consensus process, stances that were, according to Robert, believed to be contrary to self-management from the start.

Lucy mentions that when tensions rose over an issue not important to you, stepping out of the way was expedient, but that this giving over allowed for others to control or dominate a process, ultimately shaping the organization.

I feel like so many people involved are just nice fucking people, not that they aren't strong or not willing to fight for shit, but it's just not worth it to deal with the negativity and the backlash from standing up to someone. It allows people who are more controlling to control because the other people are like, "Okay, I'll just keep going and deal with my own shit." When the potential consequences are nastiness and negativity and it's something you don't feel strongly about, it's just easier not to participate. The people who are more forceful are the ones who are going to get their way because the rest of us, while we care, in all these little bitty things, it's just not worth it.

About the self-management roots of the Public House and the conflict between process-oriented people and people less interested or resistant to process, Robert said,

This isn't an anarchist project, it's a participatory democracy. I think part of it is ...any semblance of structure or order is the Man, and the idea of being process-less and being flexible and rolling with it and it happening in this organic way is a really great idea, idealistically, but I don't think that... I think that it is too important to think about things like safety and respect and inclusion as far as voices silenced, I think that process is part of the joy of decision making. The

learning process, the leadership development and all of that, and what I imagine this anarchist free-form “unprocess” is an opportunity for power to be exerted in unhealthy ways.

In line with Freeman’s “tyranny of structurelessness” theory, Robert argued “free-form unprocess” in an organization opening the way for power to be exerted upon others. In reflection, Robert identified the lack of structure and relationship foundation as a point of weakness.

If we could go back I think we would spend a lot more time preparing a little bit more infrastructure before opening because I think a lot of the challenges that have happened at the Public House through its opening has really been focused on some of that infrastructure not being in place... and folks relying on relationships, which is important, but sometimes can’t necessarily sustain other kinds of challenges. And can sometimes be a hindrance to efficiency and process and success.

During interviews, several participants expressed the belief that the absence of process was demonstrated by a lack of enrolled texts outlining disciplinary mechanisms, texts that may have allowed the group to handle personnel problems in a non-reactive way, rather than to address them ad hoc.

The Manifesto failed to address the tensions it embodied. Below, I show two manifestations of the rifts the Manifesto failed to address, which precipitated a destabilization of the network: the reliance on momentum, and the issue of the distribution of labor in the network.

## Reliance on Momentum Rather than Stability

In the heady rush to open the business, details of policies had to wait. A reliance on momentum rather than organizational genres helped to destabilize the network. Despite tensions in the network, the Public House opened in less than two years. According to Levi, forward momentum carried them through early disagreements and philosophical conflict. Levi, Lucy, and Sean agreed early momentum was spent building a business rather than focusing on process and structures like how agreements would be made, what constitutes an agreement, and other details; energy was spent on the short-term goal of opening. For Levi, this focus was a strategic use of time.

A lot of groups, when you are founding something you are so involved in starting it up you don't worry about the process-y things. Which is good and bad. I have been in groups that tried to do the process-y things and then that's all you do, you never actually start anything. Because now we have all this organizational method for a thing that doesn't exist yet. Because we never started it. You can spend a year doing that, or you can spend a year starting something and then realize you have no process. That can be problematic, but if you started it and then you go back and make a process, it's a pain in the butt but you can do it. Whereas if you have a process and no group, that will fizzle out and then you don't have a group.

Forward momentum was expended starting the bar, meeting licensing deadlines and other essential tasks, and not reflecting on what or how internal processes were developing among the group to create stability.

Perhaps one reason these texts were not created was that, unlike the Manifesto, which represented compromises on the structure, the divisions on discipline were too deep to inscribe

compromise. Once this “opening” momentum is spent, fissures that were already present began to rupture.

### Distribution of Labor in the Network

Contention over volunteer versus paid labor arose from the arguably inherent incompatibility between self-management and processed-focused organizers. Sean mentions part of the group especially wanted the Public House to be involved in job creation, rather than being volunteer run. Levi and Sean both recounted that some members believed a volunteer workforce was the only way for the business to be sustainable, at least in the beginning. This tension over labor would be a recurring issue as the network grew in size.

As people began to rely more and more on the material reality of the bar, labor became an even bigger point of conflict. Initially everyone involved was a volunteer. As bartenders, they received tips. Levi said this decision was made so that the bar could open without the overhead of paying employees.

When we first started out the board members were going to be volunteer bartenders and we'll live on tips... Legally you can't have unpaid workers getting tips.

This introduction of wages brought to light a pivotal conflict inside the network between actors who earned a wage and those who decided on a wage (some individuals fell into both categories). Levi stated that once the bar became more polarized between directors and employees, the rift deepened.

We had not started out with a plan that we are going to pay this wage, we started off like, it's just us and we are doing it for volunteer-sake because we want to get

this thing off the ground. And then, no we have to pay ourselves for tax purposes. So that \$3.33 an hour was the least we could pay ourselves... And then a year later some of the bartenders were like, we are only earning 3.33 an hour and that's terrible, the worst possible wages you can make, this is ridiculous... So there was some internal debate going on about is our social responsibility to be open and to be a space in the neighborhood? Is our responsibility to pay our workers a decent wage? What is a decent wage?

Unlike a conventional business where, at such an impasse, a CEO, manager, or sole proprietor would default as the head of the organization and make the decision, at the Public House, texts and the over-arching narrative of cooperative ownership held them together. Texts like the Manifesto, bylaws, codes of conduct, and other co-created texts enrolled individual founders long enough to coordinate action, but failed to address deep contradictions and tensions the texts embodied. Already, the story was beginning to fray around the edges.

### **Workers Collective: An Uneasy Network Compromise**

The Workers Collective was a sort of compromise between self-management and the process-oriented camps. The Manifesto both created and legitimized the Worker Collective within the Public House network, additionally legitimized through other co-created texts like the mission statement and bylaws. As the employee branch of the Public House, it evolved to include all paid employees, contractors, and volunteers. As Levi pointed out, at the formation of the bar, individuals volunteered to staff the bar. Over time, the positions developed into permanent paid positions (Sean, Levi) and these positions were inscribed into a document entitled "Job Descriptions & division of labor for the Public House Workers' Collective." Each

position was occupied by an individual who had been working at the bar for some time, in some cases since it opened. Levi points out that only people with prior experience in these jobs filled the finance and managerial positions.

### **Workers Collective Texts**

According to Sean and Levi, many of the earliest organizers of the Public House felt that having a separate, self-managing collective aligned with the bylaw value-statement of “collective worker management.” *Cultivate Coop* explains the difference between a worker cooperative and a worker collective.

A worker collective is a particular kind of worker cooperative. A worker collective adheres to the same cooperative principles as does a worker cooperative. However, worker collectives also adopt a non-hierarchical (often called a “flat” or “horizontal”) management structure. This means that all workers are equal co-managers: nobody has un-recallable decision-making power or authority over another worker. Smaller decisions may be made by individuals, department teams, or committees, but all collective members participate in both major management and governance decisions. (cultivate.coop)

Several documents enroled the position of the Workers Collective within the structure of the Public House. These texts are important in understanding the parameters and responsibility of the Workers Collective to the Board of Directors and vice versa. Another text that supported the Workers Collective is the organizational chart in the Riverwest Public House Board Manual.

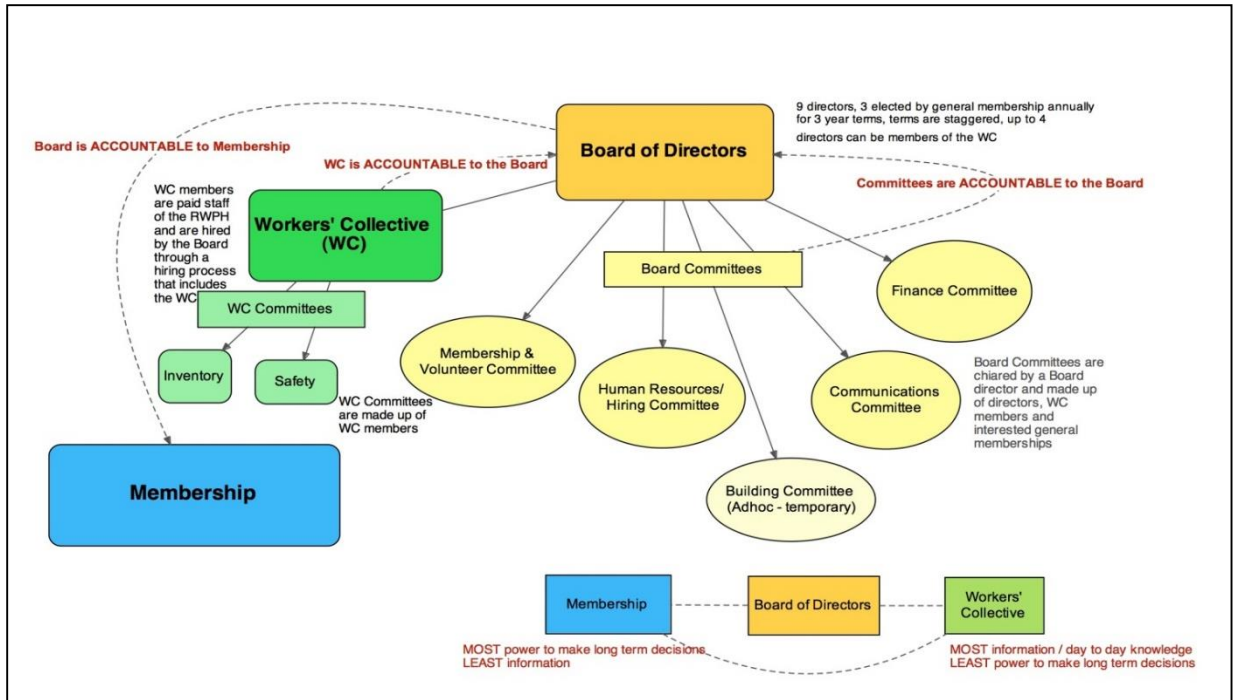


Figure 5: Structure Chart from Board Manual, p. 18

According to this model, the Workers Collective consisted of bartenders and “auxiliary positions: events, inventory, finance, and Fancy Pants (“Workers Collective Intro to New Hires”). Each auxiliary position was decided through group agreement and transcribed in “Job Descriptions & division of labor for the RWPH Workers Collective,” formalizing the positions into the structure of the Workers Collective and into the overall structure of the Public House.

### Network Positions

These four positions together formed a general manager. All necessary managerial tasks were to be covered by the four. Out of all of these positions, no one had unrecalable authority over another (cultivate.coop; Zeuli and Cropp 37). The formalized descriptions, boundaries, and duties of each were clearly bounded and transcribed, which became a circulating artifact within the network. The Fancy Pants role evolved to be a catch-all position, intended to catch loose ends

and to “bottom-line,” that is, to ensure tasks were completed (*Board of Directors; Workers Collective*). The title Fancy Pants was chosen over “manager” or “lead,” intending to subvert some of the authority of a bottom-liner. According to Sean, the term Fancy Pants was a ludic jab at the authority granted to a manager.

My recollection is that it was Sophia who first said it and did so tongue-in-cheek, mocking how we were going to have a manger-like roll despite the fact we were a workers collective. I think it stuck because, as a workers collective, we didn't want to acknowledge fully that we were implementing managerial structure but at the same time did recognize that we needed leadership from someone with bartending experience (most bartenders were newbies when we first opened). So we just made light of the position and continued calling Xavier's position fancy pants.

What “bottom-lining” means is spelled out in the job description for Fancy Pants: “They will be tasked with overseeing the bar as a whole and is the “go-to bartender for training, quality control, and day-to-day personnel issues or questions” (Job Descriptions & division of labor for the Public House Workers' Collective”).

The term “bottom-liner” or “bottom-line” is a colloquialism that seems to mean the one who makes sure it happens, the one who will take responsibility if it doesn't (*Board of Directors; Workers Collective*). A Workers Collective with a lead or pseudo-manager introduces the tension from the start, and in a sense is a step away from collectivity. At best, it institutes hybridity between horizontal and vertical structures.

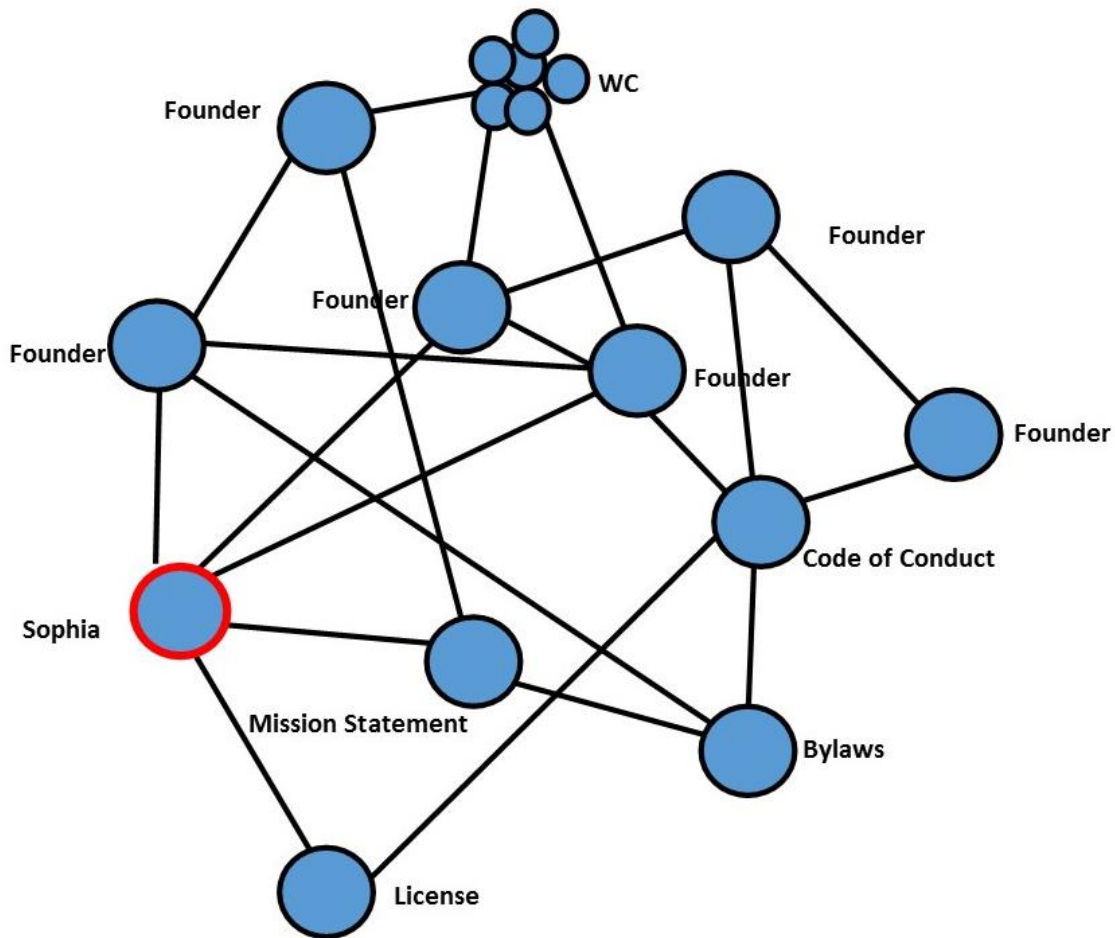


Figure 6: Founding Network

Figure 6 shows the network at the end of the first stage of organizing: the Workers Collective was in place, along with several key texts. Included in this network is an actor who will come to embody the philosophy of worker autonomy and collectivity: Sophia. A founder dedicated to self-management, Sophia comes to play a role in the reorganizing of the Public House.

At the end of the first phase of organizing—after establishing the organization with the city and within the neighborhood, and fulfilling the requirements of Wisconsin law—the network included the Workers Collective, founders, and texts, hanging together through agreements and

exchanges. Though these links were at times tenuous, the network was stabilized enough that the organization could achieve common goals such as fundraising, opening, and operating.

### **Re-organization: The Destabilized Network Manages Innovation**

As the network grew, it gradually added necessary texts that stabilized the organization including bylaws, job descriptions, and an organizational chart. As new actors came in, the network shifted to include new positions and new links between new texts and human actors. Because of the lack of disciplinary regulation, exacerbated by the tensions between self-management and process, managerial oversight of the day-to-day operations of the bar—tentatively embodied in the Fancy Pants position—deteriorated and links began to fray. As new actors were enrolled and other actors left the network, tensions that had existed since inception began to re-emerge within the stabilized-for-now texts and within the network.

While texts reified the Workers Collective *within* the structure of the Public House overall, there were few internal texts within the Workers Collective. Without formal structure and other mechanisms like evaluations, peer review, clear protocols for a rule infraction, or even a general code of conduct, the few extent workplace procedures in place could be difficult to enforce. As business increased and expanded, founders left to pursue other projects and employees arrived who did not have the same relationship to the texts as the founders who drafted them, for whom they represented a compromise. Without founders to re-inscribe intent continually, interpretations began to shift. Once again, the lack of texts outlining procedures and formal mechanisms of power led to disruptions in the network. Only this time, people began to notice.

## **Destabilizing the Network: Failures in the Texts**

It is difficult to trace where it began, but by March 2014, changes in the network brought tensions to a head. The failure to create texts outlining formalized roles and procedures of the network, and an increasing reliance on the Fancy Pants to interpret and implement the extant informal and formal procedures, leading to the re-emergence of discordance between self-management and process perspectives and an increasingly destabilized network. The Workers Collective began to experience failure indicated by four events.

First, Lucas, acting as Fancy Pants, noticed that money was missing from the safe and reported it. This information was sent out via email to the Board of Directors for response and action (Lucas).

Second, the energy company almost disconnected power for lack of payment. A happenstance meeting between Lucas and the energy company stopped the disconnection (Lucas, “A Couple of Issues...”). A disconnection would have been disastrous to a business with a razor-thin financial margin.

Third, rent was past due. The newly signed and negotiated lease stated checks must be sent before the first of the month in a three-month batch, post-dated. The first batch was not sent on time and therefore rent was late, putting the Public House in violation of a newly signed, renegotiated lease. The Board of Directors, the legal representatives of the business, were not aware of this failure until the property owner contacted them through email (Emily, “Re: A Couple of Issues...”)

Fourth, in addition to the financial management problems, inventory was suffering. When the bar is short on supplies, Lucas and other bartenders paid retail prices for beer, liquor, or other bar supplies, a costly fix that eliminates profit. While running out of critical inventory, other

inventory ran amok. A critical item missing from the job descriptions, and not designated to be anyone's job, was a tracking system for the inventory of the bar including liquor, beer, wine, soft drinks, and snacks. Additionally, the inventory position was not in communication with the finance system, but Fancy Pants communicated with both independently, attempting to fill in the gaps of all the positions. The slippage in inventory was also costly. The Fancy Pants, who has many years of bar manager experience, resolved to tighten inventory, filling gaps in job descriptions and accountability. He noted part of the problem was the formalized job roles were unclear:

The problem is that we have redundancies - multiple people getting paid to do the same job - the job isn't really getting done and we're paying twice for it. That's fiscally totally unsound. (*Board of Directors*)

In each case, Lucas must either act autonomously, contrary to the self-management culture of the bar, or allow failure.

Lucas filled multiple job duties, an indication that job descriptions were inadequate without disciplinary mechanisms or structure in place. In the case of Sophia, the lack of formalized description made it difficult to assess the efficacy of the position. For example, there was confusion over whether or not the finance position required QuickBooks entries. Without a car, she was unable to make daily deposits. Lucas picked up delivery of the deposits, but they were made infrequently, which made tracking money difficult and left large sums in the bar. To add to the confusion, in violation of the bylaws, the treasurer position was vacant since the last treasurer resigned suddenly. Additionally, there was no real-time tracking of hours for the auxiliary positions.

The situation became critical as the bar quickly lost money and became reliant on well-attended events to carry the bar from month to month, and eventually week to week. The bar was on the edge of insolvency, barely able to pay monthly bills, and then paychecks. In a desperate move, employees volunteered to give up paychecks until the situation was resolved.

Frustrations built to the boiling point: lack of payment of bills, lack of understanding of the finances, lack of control of inventory, and lack of real-time tracking of working hours (*Board of Directors; Special Finance Meeting*). Meeting notes from the months before the change reflected their deep anxiety: “Financial situation is dire,” “We had a record February in terms of sales but came out with a \$50 profit,” “Put positive energy out there even if we’re freaking out internally” (*Board of Directors*).

Sensing the threat to the existence of Public House, the Board of Directors instituted a series of changes, exerting a rare moment of top-down authority upon the Workers Collective, suspending collectivism and participatory management, ultimately unveiling the schism that had been present since its founding.

### **Stabilizing the Network: Reorganization**

With the help and consent of the Workers Collective, the Board terminated all positions and consolidated them into two positions: Front-of-the-House, and Back-of-the-House. These two positions were understood as temporary fixes for a nine-month period, until the financial and managerial fractures could be resolved. All current Workers Collective members were open to apply. The Board hired Lucas as the Front-of-the-House and Will as the Back-of-the-House, a financial-focused managerial position. On April 26, 2014, the new job descriptions and positions were voted on and accepted. When asked about the problem with asymmetry power relations

between a general manager and the Workers Collective, the notes on that day recorded Will's response.

Will argues that the Workers collective has no shortage of great goals and great ideas, but where we need the GMs is to enforce these. Workers collective decides the what, and the GMs decide the how. We are creating these jobs so that in 9 months everybody has clarity about how everything works/needs to work.

Will's response points toward the general acceptance that there was a need for "enforcement" and "clarity," a general acceptance that self-management had failed. Previously, the prevailing philosophy of management was free-form, open, and dynamic; now, the organization moved toward bureaucratization and centralization, a resounding rebuff of self-management in favor of process.

Critically, the organizational narrative shifted to support this change in philosophy. The stories the Public House once told about itself shifted from open support of the self-management perspective to the idea that a process perspective would better direct the organization.

One example of this shift is how bylaws came to be re-read in service of the reorganization. Whereas before, as embodied in the bylaws, collectivity was said to be valued very highly and centralization of authority was resisted. Several board members and employees voiced concern that instituting the change in focus from a collective to a managerial structure necessitated a bylaw change (*Board of Directors*). According to Wisconsin law, however, bylaw changes would need to be voted on by the membership (Wisconsin Statute §185.07). This vote did not occur; rather, the bylaws come to be reinterpreted to support the reorganization. This reinterpretation occurred across several organization documents and their internal narrative. That is, in support of network changes, the narrative shifted from a refusal to compromise on values of

collective management even if they closed their doors, to doing whatever it took to keep the bar open, even if it meant compromising on values and ideals it started with. This shift was necessary to bring about stability. The rifts between the self-management and process regimes was untenable.

The network morphed from a structure of self-management to include new systems of oversight management; documents came to be interpreted in light of the changes made.

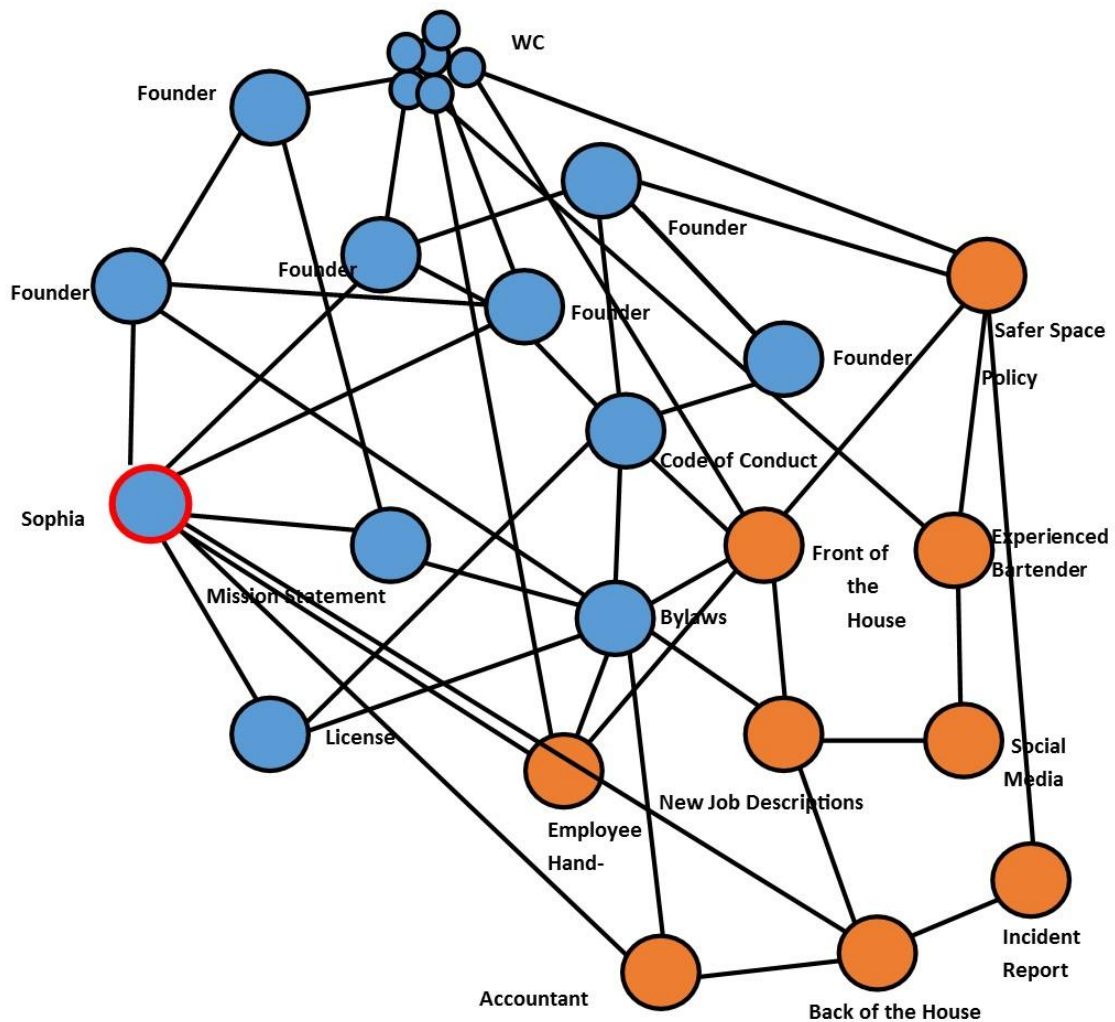


Figure 7: Changes in Network Enrollments

Figure 7 shows the transition of the Public House network, with multiple texts and individuals enrolled. Now a robust network, supplying multiple jobs, stability became a critical need. At this time, Sophia's enrollments were still intact, even as the narrative shifted.

### **Transmission of Change: Employee Handbook**

So what happened to the Manifesto? During this period of dynamic philosophical and structural change, what happened to the document that had once been the cornerstone of compromise at the Public House?

By the time of my study, the Manifesto had fallen out of use. In fact, my research brought the existence of the Manifesto to the attention of some the current employees and directors who were previously unaware of its existence. In the passage of time from the foundation of the Public House, where the Manifesto served as the keystone of coordinated action, many supportive texts had become enrolled in the network. Between these supportive texts, oral histories, and organizational narratives, the Manifesto was no longer looked to as a point of cohesion. As the Manifesto did not address disciplinary concerns, it provided no insight to the current problems. Concurrently, as the Manifesto embodied the compromises from the founding group, as it fell aside, so did the social capital of the founders embedded in it.

As Front-of-the-House, with full board support, Lucas decided to create an employee handbook, a normalizing document that would have been unthinkable in the wild hay days of self-management. The employee handbook, codifying expectations for work, concretized an asymmetrical power dynamic earliest proponents of self-management would have objected to resolutely.

At this point, the mantra “for the good of the co-op” and a drive toward solvency becomes a force of change and a point of cohesion for the group. Rather than arguing over small details, as Robert and Lucy pointed out, agreements formed around best practices for the cooperative, even at the expense of ideals present at its founding. The employee handbook represented this cohesion.

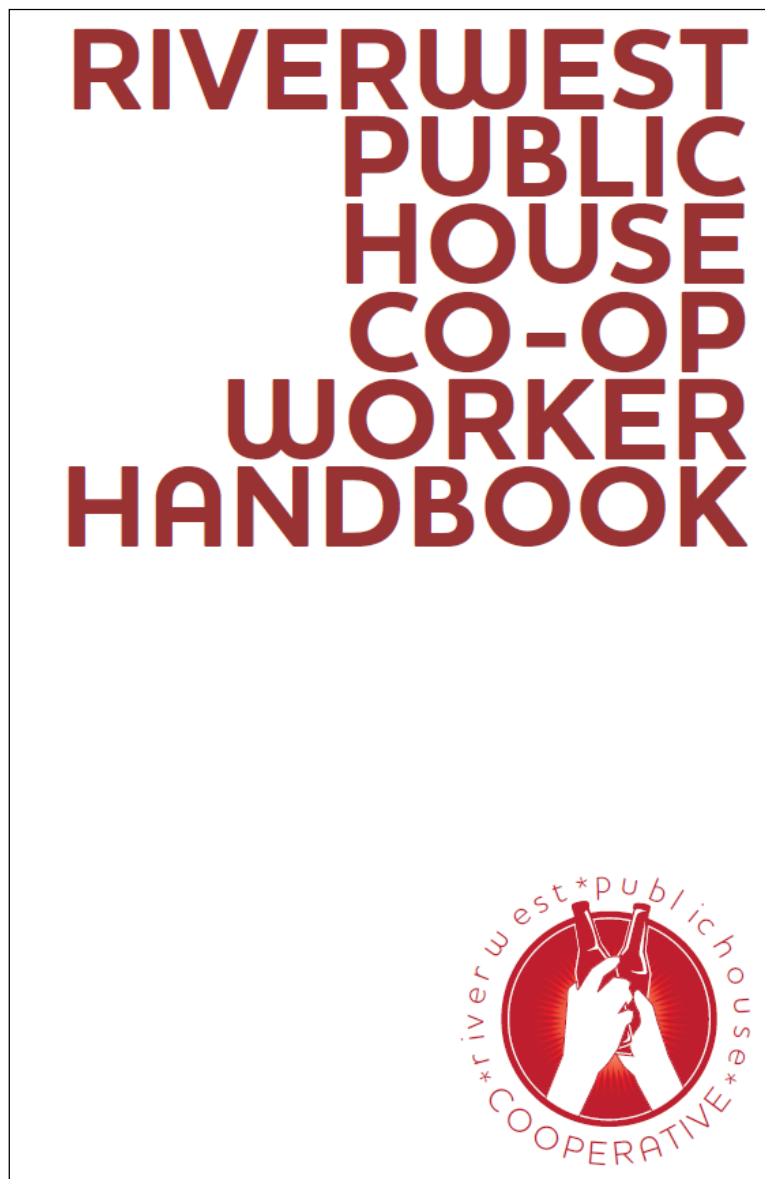


Figure 8: Worker Handbook Cover

The cover is noticeably different from the Manifesto, which recalled stenciled, radical and militant street fliers. Instead, the font type is rounded and minimalist. The new logo includes the raised fists of the old logo, but with a more polished look. Rather than a banner behind the hands, there is a circle. The handbook is bound in a three-ring binder for easier addendum. Absent is a Table of Contents because, unlike the Manifesto, the handbook was intended to be an evolving document and not a concretization of compromises born through conflict.

The second page is a welcome with armed revolutionary figures, calling to mind the Zapatistas or an anarchist black bloc. In an almost schizophrenic manner, this image and the emphasis on collectivity in the passage hark back to the self-management focus of the earliest organizers, organizers who identified as anarchists and radicals.

# WELCOME.

You're on staff at the Riverwest Public House Cooperative, one of the only cooperatively owned and collectively managed bars in the world. What does that mean? Well, first it means you don't really have a boss. In some ways, that makes it harder to run the business. In other ways, it makes it easier to be great at your job. It allows you to excel and actualize your ideas without asking permission of someone higher up than you. But while we don't have a manager to complain about, we do have to look across the table at each other and in the mirror at ourselves. We run this place together and on our own, so it's up to each of us to make it the best bar it can possibly be. Or not. It's up to us.

This handbook is a work in progress. Just like the bar. Just like us as humans. It is bound in such a way that we can add to it or subtract from it as the situation changes, as policies evolve, as we get more creative, as we get more sophisticated. It is meant to be a tool for the workers so they don't have to waste their time and energy searching through notes and policies for the answer to a simple question. And it's meant to help make the bar more consistent for members and customers.

Keep it close!



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815 East Locust St. MKE, WI 53212 414-562-9472

Figure 9: Welcome

The explanatory tone of the passage serves multiple purposes: not only does it introduce new hires, but it also persuades readers to an authorized vision of the bar. In his work on narrative and organizational change, Faber remarks, “Each organization is a constant site of discursive struggle” (103) and “...narrative acts as an instrument of power within organizations as predominant narratives structure how people view their organizational environment” (31). Words like “we,” “us,” and “ourselves” identify the reader as part of the Public House. The passage mentions two goals at the bottom of the welcome: a source for a right answer and consistency.

In stark contrast to self-management (i.e., workers as a resource and the do-it-yourself ethic of the bar), “Welcome” functions as a normative text, a precursor for the rest of the document.

# OPENING PROCEDURES

(ALL TO BE DONE BY OPENING / ARRIVE 30 MIN. BEFORE OPEN)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| ___ Turn on lights   | ___ Wipe down all menus  |
| ___ Outdoor sign light   | Set up bar:  |
| ___ Behind bar switches (liquor lights, dome lights, 40 oz. lights)  | ___ Place bar mats   |
| ___ West wall = "var" low  | ___ Put away and polish last night's glassware   |
| ___ North wall spotlight plugged in                                  | ___ Wipe down all sink areas (esp. wash sinks after last night's dishes are away)                      |
| ___ Stage lights = dim   | ___ Reassemble soda guns   |
| ___ Pitcher of hot water down urinal, then bucket of ice             | ___ Remove and wash tapper cappers (soak them in soda water)   |
| ___ Bucket of ice in each cooling unit sink (by soda guns)           | ___ Place menus / table tents / brunch menus (weekends) on bar and tables                              |
| ___ Fill bleach water bucket for rags                                | ___ Cut lemons and limes, place in tray  |
| ___ Wipe down bar / tables / drink rail                              | ___ Get drawer from filing cabinet, count it! (If it does not equal \$200, place a note in the drawer) |
| ___ Straighten up tables and chairs                                  | ___ Turn on register, enter your clerk #   |
| ___ Straighten up stage (no cleaning supplies, old events equipment) | ___ Turn on music!   |
| ___ Straighten up flyer piles (remove expired)                       | ___ Key open doors   |
| ___ Turn on pinball machine  |  |
| ___ Check "86" Board to know what we're out of                       |  |

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Figure 10: Checklist

This example of a checklist, one of many found in the handbook, describes the correct procedures for opening the bar, unveiling the normative nature of the handbook. The passive voice and implied “you” veils writers’ authority. Lucas’s extensive experience as a bartender and as Fancy Pants, coupled with the authority granted him by the Board, enabled the creation of a top-down document systematizing one particular procedure over another. Other writings in the document did include procedures drafted by someone else (me), the inclusion of which was a decision made by the book’s creators.

Just as the Manifesto enacted the tensions within the bar, so the handbook enacted the recent tensions between worker collective management and top-down management, between self-management and process. Like the Manifesto, the employee handbook represented compromises to facilitate coordinated action. Unlike the Manifesto whose purpose was conciliatory (Sean), this handbook was normative. Uncomfortable with complete top-down authority, the Welcome brings up collectivity and shared governance, while the checklists harken a systematizing of policy incompatible with self-management—unless the workers co-create those policies. In this case, however, authorized by the Board of Directors (“Leadership Meeting-Divvyed Job Descriptions Updated 4.26.14”), Lucas created those policies and instituted them via the handbook, ultimately vastly improving procedures and practices.

The handbook came to replace the Manifesto, which resolutely ceased to be enrolled in a network. The handbook became the new agreed-upon text that enabled coordinated action.

## **Dismissal of a Founder and Completion of Change**

As the network changed, so actors came to relate to each other differently. The new handbook and other peripheral texts came to be enrolled or reinterpreted in service of changes in

enrollments. This change is most demonstrated by a defining governance event: the removal of a founder, Sophia.

In a collective, termination is difficult because of the diffusion of responsibility into a crowd. How did a democratic group collectively fire one of their own? Answer: It was enormously difficult, but the underlying narrative of the necessity to keep the business open (“for the good of the co-op”) countered the loss of friendships and motivated the group to coalesce and fire an individual. For the fired individual, it not only leads to a loss of material goods, but also to a sense of betrayal. One of the effects of having a manager formally authorized to move into a network position is that a manager can take on the uncomfortable issue of discipline. For the Public House, having a Front-of-the-House manager resolved the diffusion of responsibility in a self-management system. Without this position, termination may not have happened at all.

Only one other individual has been fired during this research: a new hire who assaulted a customer. The notes state:

This person’s employment is terminated, but they may reapply after 6 months.

This is a serious incident, and the board is making the decision not because the workers collective failed but because it is a legal liability and explicitly in violation of our policies intolerant of violence. (*Board of Directors*)

Up until the impending termination, this is the only event on record.

In the process of the Worker Collective network changes, an incident happened involving a founder. As a founder associated with the DIY self-management faction, Sophia held authority in the organization as a long-time employee, a founder, and a person with a large network of enrollments. Members of the Workers Collective, including myself, made formal complaints about her actions, understood by some to be disruptive.

Lucas's and Sophia's authority were in conflict. Though complaints had occurred in the past, this event was handled dramatically different because of the shift of authority between invisible/informal and visible/formal power and because policies had begun to be codified. Because of her position, described by Marco and Lucy as "founder," Sophia operated with an invisible power, giving her more agency than others had. The informal, loose social structure of the Public House allowed Sophia to operate within this invisible power, which, in part, protected her job and gave authority to her words, even when they were unpopular.

With support from the Board of Directors, Lucas was given a formal role and formal authority within the Workers Collective. This authority was demonstrated when the Board turned to him with questions during a crisis; his position to speak and make changes without talking to someone else about it, and his posture at the table during a meeting showed Lucas assumed responsibility for certain tasks. Once the Board of Directors selected Lucas to be the arbitrator of discipline, his formalized authority and informal authority like Sophia's were in conflict. Lucas had formalized authority through the Board and in writing and because of effective changes he made on his own initiative, was recognized as legitimate by the Workers Collective and the Board. In these ways, Lucas grew in authority. On the other hand, the old order of self-management diminished as the Workers Collective and the Board came to accept and institute formalized offices, authority, and structure.

Sophia's invisible power was on the downslope at the same time Lucas's was on the upswing. Lucas's capacity to enroll many actors created a stable and powerful position. When the inevitable moment came when Sophia's invisible, informal power came into conflict with Lucas's visible, formalized power, Lucas was in a position of authorized power. Sophia lacked the linkages to be re-enrolled in the network.

In only a few months, Lucas instituted structure that previously did not exist and he did it by positioning himself rhetorically, enrolling other actors through the creation of the employee handbook, making withdrawals on the authority that the Board had given him, and enacting that authority into the habits of the workplace. Leveraging power in this way, Lucas also affected change in personnel.

Sophia was a founder who at times conflicted with other founders and with certain texts like the newly adopted job description, as well as the incident report, of which more than one were filed against her, including one by me. Sophia was not enrolled with a job description as—unlike the other positions—the finance position job description was never written into “Job Descriptions & division of labor for the RWPH Workers’ Collective.” Still, Sophia had enough strong enrollments that regardless of conflicts, she was continually enrolled in the networks through multiple translations of interests. Over time, as the network and translations shifted, she had fewer enrollments and eventually found herself displaced from the network. No longer re-enrolled, Sophia was terminated from her position. Though Sophia was in conflict from the beginning with some actors including nonhumans and humans alike, as long as she had enrollments, she was included in the network. Once those enrollments fell away, she was excluded from the network, shown in Figure 11.

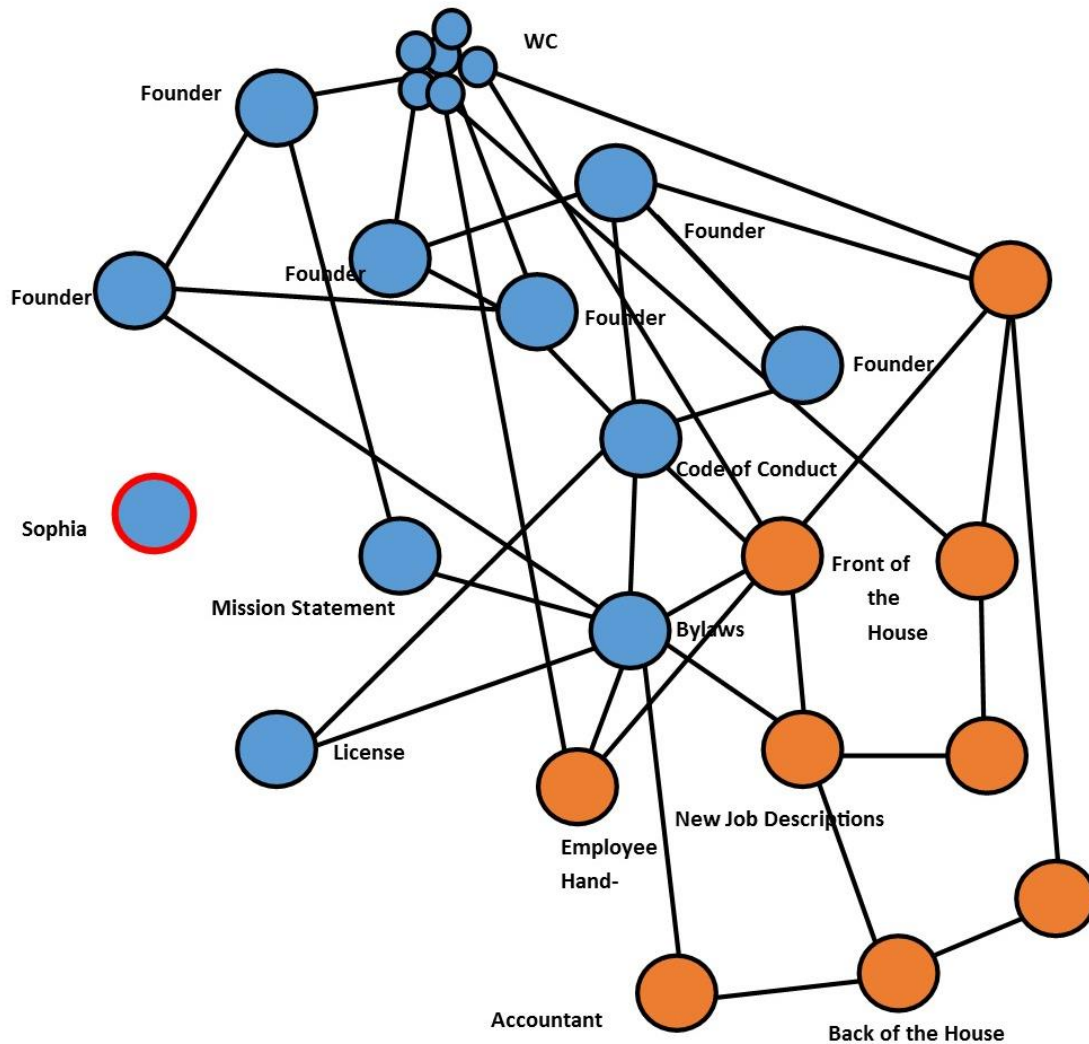


Figure 11: Dissolution/Remaking of Network

This is where the contradictions in philosophy come to a head. Lucas and Sophia each embodied the conflicted perspectives of the Public House; their conflicts dramatized the philosophical schizophrenia of the structure. Sophia's firing is a resounding rejection of the self-management philosophy, at least temporarily.

## **Reinterpretation and Change in the Workers Collective**

The transformation at the Public House has resulted in a total overhaul of the structure of the Workers Collective. In addition to eliminating positions, decision-making power was consolidated into the hands of two people who, in effect, had autonomy to make decisions without input from the Workers Collective. For example, whereas in the past, hiring decisions were made jointly between HR, the Fancy Pants, and the Workers Collective, and approved by the Board of Directors, the Front-of-the-House could hire without input from others and implement sweeping changes without approval or discussion from the Collective. These acts created a hierarchy, a vertical accountability between the workers and the Front-of-the-House and Back-of-the-House. If Front-of-the-House and Back-of-the-House could both command, but not be commanded, that is a hierarchy. This kind of authority is key to hierarchy, but also to efficiency, something the Public House desperately needed in order to survive. The authors of the job descriptions, who included Sophia, understood that the ability for the pseudo-managers to act with autonomy was integral to a functioning, streamlined, efficient business. And they selflessly enacted change understanding what it might mean for their own positions.

This move away from self-management to centralization and process was in part a move away from management that is flat, all-hands-in, heterogeneous, and arguably more democratic even if it was slow, at times inefficient, and capable of being co-opted or unduly influenced by agendas or personal conflicts.

Whether the new structure can be re-done after the probation period remains to be seen. At the time of writing, decision-making power has remained consolidated on “behalf of the Board” (*Board of Directors*). The Workers Collective moved toward more bureaucracy in the

form of record keeping, log keeping, and reporting, and shifted away from mutual monitoring to a transcription of practices.

Time management is one example of this move. Lucas sent out an email directing bartenders to clock in and out (“Time Clock”). The punch card system is a direct carryover from Taylorist regulations and control the use of employees’ time, with the employee allowed to work as needed and as the manager determines (Longo 2000; Rinehart 2006; Winsor 1996; Zuboff 1988). At IEM, employees were expected to give a certain amount of hours but were in control of when they came in (Billeaux et al. 2011). IEM is a manufacturing plant and not a consumer cooperative. However, in a bar, when a worker doesn’t show up on time, another worker is forced to stay beyond their shift to cover for it, despite Front-of-the-House and the Back-of-the-House having control of their own labor hours, self-record, and report, and have flexibility (*Board of Directors*). This imbalance in management was previously unheard of when even a code of conduct was met with resistance. Of this resistance to process, Robert said,

Sometimes you’d have people who were staunchly anti-process being like okay I’ll be on that committee. Sure. They ended up stifling any progress, so it was like they would give us an inch and we would take it and run with it and it would die because we didn’t have critical mass to have anyone follow through with it. So that happened with HR policies, with finance policies, a lot of which some people spent a lot of time spending energy into writing budgets and some calendars and writing policy and it never really became something that got taken up or the committee dissolved or nobody was showing up any more or people would stop responding to email, or come to the meeting when we had a final draft. It was exhausting.

While the “anti-process,” DIY, anarchist culture dominated the Public House prior to the financial meltdown, the focus shifted to support process, managerial oversight, and discipline. The movement to greater time regulation and recordkeeping of employee movements came to be seen as a response to the lack of trust, the feeling of “taking advantage of” the ease of the Public House’s culture.

## **Post-Mortem**

Herein lies the difficulty: without more accurate record keeping, *the Public House may have ceased to exist*. The move away from collectivism was not a political maneuver by a few power hungry individuals, but actions taken by people who wanted to keep the doors open for business. The narrative included phrases like:

- “It’s for the good of the Public House.”
- “We believe in this place and we want it to survive, so we have to do whatever is necessary to keep it open.”

These two lines could justify a drastic action that the rest of the Board supports, and if good people are on the Board who are genuinely concerned with the wellbeing and survival of the Public House it may not be bad. After all, the Board is elected to do that very thing.

Nevertheless, as was the case before the change in management, there was no mechanism in place for stalling one strong group of people or co-opting the process for an agenda. In a group of people who viewed themselves as dedicated to the mission of Public House, educated about cooperatives and cooperative development, involved in the process, the chance for manipulation was lessened. However, if those same people can be convinced that a drastic action is necessary, the Board could move with swiftness and unanimity, possibly into a direction that is not in line

with the mission.

The movement away from a collectivist approach toward a managerial approach could be viewed as counter to the bylaws, a matter of interpretation. At the time, it was viewed as a necessary emergency move. At the Annual General Meeting, two individuals spoke openly about the move away from collectivism as a necessary move in order to save the bar. At another time, when concerns were brought up on whether or not what the Board was instating meshed with the bylaws, the response was that the bylaws vaguely state the Board was being true to the values of the Workers Collective. The over-arching narrative had to be maintained, even while being re-written.

One could view the move away from collectivism as a move toward what is easier: a standard managerial structure. It is far more difficult to be a collective, to find solutions that do not turn centralization of power and control into the hands of a trained, responsible few. It is not clear if the Public House had the means or time to find those solutions. Looking at the financial reports, the human resources reports, the morale of the bar, one could argue it was the necessary, inevitable thing to do when mutual monitoring and self-regulation failed.

So is this a story about how collectivism failed? I would argue it's a story about how a large group of people came together to save their co-op, even if it meant some folks losing their jobs and some of the control they had over their work. I would also argue it is a story still being written.

## **Chapter 5: Implications for Future Research**

Chapters 1 and 2 laid the foundation of my study, providing a literature review, introducing cooperatives as relevant to professional communication, and presenting the methodologies and methods I used in this project, namely, why actor-network theory and genre theory were the most relevant frameworks for analysis. In Chapters 3 and 4, I examined the relationships that underpinned genres in the Public House networks, the impact of textual practice on their values, and the process of change that occurred as tensions came to a head. In this final chapter, I return to the issue of cooperative development from the lenses of the cooperative scholars covered earlier to posit tangible recommendations for relevant fields of study. Recommendations fall into three categories: implications for genre and actor-network theory, cooperative development, and professional communication.

### **Implications for Actor-Network and Genre Theory**

My study suggests cooperatives are fertile ground for new applications of genre and actor-network theory. This past summer, a colleague and I published an article in which we drew from my application of actor-network theory to the Public House's Board of Directors to discover ways researchers and practitioners could use actor-network theory in nonprofit board governance research. We suggested actor-network theory as a way of "opening the black box of governance."

In order to dismantle and examine power relations inside and outside the boardroom—in other words, to open the black box of governance politicking, power struggle, and actual board behavior and decision making—we may need to go beyond the established framework and images and begin to pull in alternative

views and ideas to better comprehend questions such as who really governs. One such alternate perspective is the concept of the dominant coalition... but while the dominant coalition lens provides an alternative entry point, we must also examine the issue from multiple perspectives... One such perspective that brings useful insights to the study of dominant coalitions (as well as nonprofit governance) is actor-network theory (ANT). (Andersson and Edenfield 2)

Our research pointed to the usefulness of actor-network theory in understanding board relations, that is, rather than viewing the board as a unified body, actor-network theory provided us a framework to understand the discrete facets of the governance process. Particularly suitable for unpacking board governance because of its flattened nature, actor-network theory is also a radical shift from approaches solely focused on the human element as central to governance. Actor-network theory offers researchers and practitioners a way to account for all aspects of the governance process including nonhuman elements like texts, disease, physical space, etc., and for the shifting enrollments and allegiances characteristic of governance.

In addition to actor-network theory, this study suggests important findings for genre theory, underscoring the importance of understanding not only who writes texts, but also who interprets them, for that interpretation can have widespread and lasting implications on the organization. To date, genre theory has not yet explored strategic ambiguity and its effects, particularly in horizontal organizations. My research suggests genre studies should look more closely at the political implications of strategic ambiguity in documentation and in governance. In the case of the Public House, ambiguity was an often-used strategy of cohesion and coordinated action; however, this ambiguity also allowed broad interpretation, precipitating a need for a “normed” interpretation not everyone had access to or could participate in, ultimately

undermining values of democratic participation and, eventually, the business itself. What may be of interest for genre theorists in professional communication is how strategic ambiguity can be used to enable and constrain participants in organization documentation.

In 1984, Eric M. Eisenberg identified ambiguity as a strategy in organizational communication: “People in organizations confront multiple situational requirements, develop multiple and often conflicting goals, and respond with communicative strategies which do not always minimize ambiguity, but may be nonetheless effective” (228). He goes on to say, “When communicating with close friends, incomplete phrases and vague references may engender high degrees of clarity... the same message strategies applied in less close relationships may lead to confusion and ambiguity” (230). Applied to the Public House’s earliest genres, messages that were incomplete or ambiguous were clear to the original writers, friends, and neighbors with shared context and culture. In addition, as Sean pointed out, his sticky note organizing tool “helped to—I think—pull everybody together.” Eisenberg states this cohesion is exactly the point: organizational documents are ambiguous in order to encourage multiple perspectives and to respect different interpretations of organization documents, especially in mission documents.

Strategic ambiguity fosters multiple viewpoints in organizations. This use of ambiguity is commonly found in organizational missions, goals, and plans...

Strategic ambiguity is essential to organizing because it allows for multiple interpretations to exist among people who contend that they are attending to the same message... It is a political necessity to engage in strategic ambiguity so that different constituent groups may apply different interpretations... (231)

Applying Eisenberg’s insights of ambiguity in organizational writing to the Public House shows that the ambiguity of documents like the Manifesto, mission statement, and bylaws was a

strategy, whether intentional or not, to “allow for multiple interpretations” to support coordinated activity of heterogeneous groups, promoting “unified diversity” (230).

Nevertheless, this strategy was shortsighted because as workers and volunteers left and were replaced, people were less united around an interpretation. For example, in the case of the bylaws, to someone outside of the writing process or even the culture of Public House, the phrasing of the first article of the first bylaw is unclear as a mission statement.

...to uphold cooperative standards of democracy, equality, self-responsibility, equity and solidarity and strives to operate in accordance with the values of collective worker management, living wages, strong community involvement, safe environment, responsible drinking and local products...

The article does not define what “cooperative standards” and “values of collective worker management” *mean*. Words that are fraught and/or contentious in many contexts enable and even encourage multiple interpretations among members and reflect disparate views among the writers of the documents. These multiple interpretations are, in part, responsible for the showdown between the two philosophical positions of process and self-management.

Importantly, scholars have expressed concern that textual ambiguity can lead to ethical ambiguity (Eisenberg and Goodall 1993; Paul and Strbiak 1999). While the results of my research point to the necessity of ambiguity in uniting diverse viewpoints for organized action in the beginning, ambiguity also created ethical dilemmas. For instance, the Board initially flagged a bylaw revision as necessary, but bylaws were in fact not changed or updated to reflect the change in structure. Instead, participants reinterpreted the bylaw to justify the change. The potential ethical and legal issues of this kind of ambiguity are troublesome. On the other hand,

the ability to pivot quickly enabled fast response to the crisis at hand, contributing to solvency and creating/maintaining jobs in the neighborhood.

Without hierarchy or structural mechanisms that guide the interpretive process, ambiguity will result, perhaps necessarily. Clarity may require a centralized viewpoint not possible in a direct democracy. The kinds of negotiation embodied in the Public House genres may be an inevitable part of a horizontal business.

Nevertheless, I believe my study points to the potential pitfalls of ambiguity in governance genres within a cooperative. Ambiguity as a compromise between incommensurable positions certainly led to a clash from which many businesses may not have survived. Genre studies has not yet studied this kind of political and textual complexity in a flattened organization, but given the meteoric rise of the cooperative and collective, this may be fertile ground for exploration.

## **Implications for Cooperative Development**

Cooperative development has benefited from many fields of study including geography, urban studies, and nonprofit administration, but professional communication scholarship has yet to examine the varied landscape of community-owned workspaces. My study suggests the following for cooperative development and developers: pay attention to how cooperative documentation is written, the effects of scale on that documentation, and whether that documentation supports or undermines the co-op's values.

## **Effects of Documentation on Democratic Practice**

According to cooperative scholars and practitioners, the cornerstone of a cooperative is democratic control, the “one person, one vote” principle (Zeuli and Cropp 45; see also Cheney 1995; Murphy 2011; Riverwest Public House Cooperative Bylaws 2011). My study suggests there is a correlation between control of the cooperative and access to documentation.

Cooperative founders and developers need to pay close attention to how they write documents, who has access to the writing, revision, and reading of those documents, and whether or not the documentation they produce reflects their value of democratic control.

In Chapter 1, I argued that without the bureaucratic structure of a hierarchy, social practice created the conditions for power that become embedded in organizational genres (Arendt 1961; Freeman 1970). Use of strategic ambiguity in writing the Manifesto not only created the conditions for coordinated action, but also (necessarily) failed to fully resolve the philosophical differences between the founders. Rather, the Manifesto suspended the divisions for the moment in order to complete the required tasks: getting paperwork in order, filing forms with the city, obtaining licenses, finding member-investors, writing necessary bylaws, and other tasks essential to opening the cooperative. In addition, because of its ambiguity and intentional omission of process and procedures—deemed too controversial by the incommensurable factions—the Manifesto reified a practice of norming rather than transcribing process, a practice that took place among friends and was exclusionary, ultimately undermining principles of collective management. A reliance on norming through authorized interpretation enabled unauthorized exertions of power. Zeuli and Cropp describe worker collective management as “managed by the entire membership instead of a select membership team... a flat management structure rather than a hierarchal one” (37). However, because of the way some documentation

was written and interpreted by the group, in practice, only a select team could manage, creating tensions between stated principles and practice.

While the omission was crucial to coordinated action at the time, it also set a precedent that continued even as the cooperative grew in size, effectively constraining access for new actors.

### **Effects of Scale on Management Practice**

In the case of cooperatives, the success of a system seems directly connected to the scale of operations. Tactics that work for a small-scale organization like San Francisco's Other Avenues Cooperative with 22 employees would not work for another cooperative in the same city with almost 300 employees, Rainbow Cooperative. What worked for Public House with six employees did not work when that staff was doubled, when more and more people came to rely on the materiality of the business. In the beginning, the tight-knit group of founders, however heterogeneous their philosophies, were able to come to agreement through informal, unwritten rules, to socially manage the organization, and to rely on informal practices like mutual monitoring (Billeaux et al. 2011; Polletta 2002). However, as the business grew and founders left and were replaced by newcomers (and a lot of them), strategies that worked in the past strained to keep up.

When scale increases (or decreases), needs change and writing strategies must also change. Williams, Young-Hyman, and Cheney have each addressed the issue of scale and the ways various cooperatives come to deal with it. Young-Hyman's investigation of Union Cab reveals that, as in the case of Public House, reorganization was necessary as scale increased (2013). Tulais at Other Avenues Cooperatives revealed that their Board of Directors consciously

decided to stay small in scope in order to exert greater control at the worker level and to allow for idiosyncratic, emergent practices (personal correspondence). Williams and Cheney have examined the issue of scale and considered the democratic challenges an expanding cooperative could face (Cheney 1995; Williams 2007).

I recommend that cooperatives fully recognize scale as a condition when writing organization documents, particularly within procedural and governing genres. While resolving differences can risk stultification, ignoring or writing in ambiguity as a way of moving forward from those differences does not eliminate and only delays them, simultaneously creating the need for norms and narratives to address what has gone unprinted. As in the case of the Public House and Union Cab, as scale increases, documentation that may have once been adequate needed to be rewritten for changing networks.

## **Implications for Professional Communication Research**

My research represents one of the first attempts to critically examine a cooperative through the professional communication lens. So what can we learn from them and how can we help cooperatives succeed?

### **Tension as a Condition for Innovation**

Professional communication theories can learn from how worker cooperatives are able to capitalize successfully on tensions that could stymie a business and how cooperators employ these tensions as a source of innovation and creativity. The longevity of the cooperative model has proven that they have calculated ways to capitalize on these tensions, as those who do not successfully navigate these conflicts eventually close their doors.

Research by Winsor, Longo, Clark, and Zachry have explored the relationship between genres, power, and hierarchy, but current scholarship does not yet account for this nuanced communication/productivity relationship. Research into worker cooperatives could be productive as the complexity in communication in this kind of horizontal organization invites political and social connections to direct the practices and even the ethos of the business. It is also productive because, to be sustainable, these group agreements enable a cooperative structure to evolve as needed while capitalizing on social ties in the community. For example, if a business begins to falter, stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process, expediting corrective action.

### **Professional Communication Support for Cooperative Research**

Below I look at three areas for application of professional communication concepts in worker collective research: project management, genre theory, and productivity.

First, further research on cooperatives might include an examination of project management in a worker cooperative. IEM has demonstrated great success with their project management strategies, handling multi-million dollar engineering projects and thousands of billable hours. They negotiate project management on a large scale while maintaining a commitment to flat management and group agreement (Billeaux et al. 8-9). Previous research on collaboration might bring an examination of the success of compromise and problem solving in manufacturing and technical cooperatives where a heterogeneous, flat team accomplishes a highly technical task over a long period.

Secondly, researchers may analyze the role of genres in a cooperative as this relationship of power and texts can shed light on how genres are stabilized and constrained over time in a highly social, relatively unstable group. Distributed cognition is an approach to genres that may

enable a social analysis of genres in the worker cooperative. Distributed cognition is cognition distributed across different people who enable each other's work, who "supplement and support" it (Winsor "Learning" 15), a concept highly applicable to worker cooperatives in which large groups of people rely on communication to make informed decisions. Distributed cognition approaches thinking as an act that takes place not completely inside an individual's head, but "that is distributed among the individual, other people, the physical environment, and the tools the person uses, including language and such language structures as genres" (Winsor "Learning" 6). Stabilized-for-now genres are fundamental in systems of distributed cognition, which Winsor advocates are the rule in workplaces, rather than the exception (Winsor "Learning" 5).

The process by which texts become generic and stabilized in a cooperative is a rich example of distributed cognition. In Bitzer's terms, texts respond to a rhetorical situation and because these situations are repeated, a rhetorical response draws on the previous text, and a generic text is developed: "Each text draws on previous texts written in response to similar situations. Through such interaction of texts, genres evolve as recurring" (Devitt 338; Miller 1984). A text is understood as generic because they can be applied to multiple situations (e.g., employee codes of conduct or handbooks). These generic texts stabilize relationships and regulate the actions of heterogeneous groups so they can work together (Winsor "Using" 3). Because they are stable representations that people use to regulate each other, nowhere is this feature more important than in the complex communication practices at the site of a worker cooperative.

Thirdly, the important dialectic between power, communication, and productivity merits further research. A worker cooperative is a key site to study this dynamic as some research suggests worker cooperatives may outperform conventional enterprises (Craig and Pencavel,

1995; Murphy, 2011; Williams, 2007). Logue and Yates suggested as much in their study on worker cooperatives where they established that the strength of worker cooperatives lies not in the ownership model per se, but in participation and communication about finances, training, and cultural changes (2001). Craig and Pencavel underlined the importance of communication and agency in productivity: “worker-owners are more likely to be much better informed about actions taken by managers than are non-worker-owners” (124). A better understanding of this connection might potentially add to not only professional communication theories of effective communication in the workplace, but also pedagogy, and organization and management research.

Finally, this research provides an opportunity to intersect professional communication and social justice. In the case of my research site, Milwaukee is an intensely segregated city fraught with a range of looming social issues including rampant violence, police brutality, and poverty. In similar cities, cooperatives have been at the epicenter of social change. To study communication at such a site prompts questions about the potential of this kind a business: can joint ownership contribute to the transformation of a community? If so, what role could university/community partnerships play in that transformation?

## **Conclusion**

Looking forward, many questions remain. I look forward to expanding my rhetorical analysis to include more cooperatives, particularly worker cooperatives, with an eye toward making a substantial contribution of connecting professional communication research with the cooperative model, and demonstrating to cooperatives the importance of rhetoric, especially when writing documents. Two cooperatives I am interested in working with are the prisoner’s cooperative in Puerto Rico and a trans Latina beauty shop in Queens, New York.

What has been called “the world’s first prisoner cooperative” (Nzinga Ifateyo 2015), the Cooperativa de Servicios ARIGOS commodifies prisoners’ artwork. Importantly, the cooperative has been successful at reducing recidivism and has been linked to helping prisoners in a way that traditional means have failed:

Through working with the art, a more important change took place—the inmates changed themselves through constructive and satisfying work. “We started to change the way we saw the world,” Rodriguez said. “It ended up transforming our lives practically without us noticing... It was important for us because it allowed us to be in contact with our community. This became part of our rehabilitation process.” (Nzinga Ifateyo, 2015)

I would like to take a closer look at the connection between cooperation and rehabilitation by tracing the texts they created and used through the process. I believe that doing so not only supports the work they are already doing, but also contributes to one major question being asked of the professional communication field: how can we move from talking about social justice to enacting it?

In a similar vein, another cooperative I would like to examine more critically is a new trans Latina women’s cooperative in New York City. Dekimpe writes, “Their business, the first of its kind in New York City, aims to provide stable and dignified jobs for the women and to serve as a model to other transgender workers who have faced employment discrimination.” This cooperative was founded in part to help trans women have meaningful, dignified work. Dekimpe writes,

A 2013 Make the Road survey of the LGBTQ community in Manhattan and Queens found transgender and gender non-conforming individuals face the

highest rates of unemployment among those surveyed. Forty-three percent of transgender respondents said they were looking for a job; 40 percent said they had experienced some form of discrimination based on their gender identity when being considered for a job or promotion; and 44 percent said they had been forced to quit a job because of discrimination they endured in the workplace. (2015)

Faced with such staggering statistics, the need for support is profound. As with Cooperativa de Servicios ARIGOS, this cooperative is responding to a true, deep human need. Collaborating with this kind of cooperative and supporting their work either through my own research or through service-learning projects with students may contribute to their long-term success.

The trans Latina beauty shop is set in a backdrop of a larger cultural turn toward cooperation, sharing, and bartering as economic alternatives to capitalism. In 2014, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio allocated a “historic \$1.2 million initiative to fund the development of worker cooperatives” (“New York City Invests \$1.2 Million in Worker Cooperatives”). Similarly, in Cleveland, Ohio; Jackson, Mississippi; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and all over the country, administrators are turning toward worker cooperatives as a way of revitalizing areas and providing human services in a fiscally conservative way. As such, I believe my research on the role of rhetoric in cooperatives will support economic development, and begin to bridge the divide between talking about social justice and enacting it.

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# Appendix

## Interview Questions

### **1. What can these negotiations teach us about productivity and power among workers in smaller, loosely structured work groups?**

If there are any, who are the heavy lifters at the RWPH? Why do you think they are in that position? Do you think it helps or hurts the collective management structure of the workers collective?

Are you content with the present structure of the workers collective?

What is the relationship, if any, between the present structure and your own productivity? Do you feel more productive or less?

Would you say the structure of the workers collective is formal or informal? Would one way work better than another?

Have there been times you personally felt the collective management structure failed or was in danger of failing? If so, describe that situation.

Have there been times you wished the collective management structure was something different? If so, describe the situation and what you would like to have been different.

### **2. What can collective management teach us about flexibility and appropriation of workplace genres?**

What are the most common tools you use to communicate? What is the most popular tool to use for the group?

How effective do you think the communication tools you and other workers use are in communicating about business matters?

How often do you refer back to cooperative documents (handbooks, job descriptions, bylaws, emails, meeting notes, etc.) to figure out what to do, or what is expected of you? When you do, what are you trying to do? How do the texts help you?

What's best about workplace communication here?

What ways does communication sometimes fail or break down?

How do you think you use cooperative texts to complete your work tasks?

Name an instance where communication broke down. Why do you think it happened?

### **3. How does the rhetoric of empowerment shape/become shaped by the Collective?**

Describe the power a worker has at the Public House.

Looking back on your experiences of work at the Public House or other jobs, how have you felt the collective management structure empowered you? Can you give an example?

How has it disempowered you?

What, if anything, have you given up by not having a manager or conventional business structure?

What, if any, are the connections between management types and worker participation or sense of ownership?

# Curriculum Vitae

## Avery Edenfield

### EMPHASES

Rhetoric and community action. Cultural studies in technical and professional communication. Organizational communication. Writing in the Disciplines (WID).

### EDUCATION

Ph.D. in English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), 2016  
Milwaukee WI

Areas of Concentration: Rhetoric and Composition, Professional Writing

Dissertation: "Collective Management in a Cooperative: Problematizing Productivity and Power"

Core Committee: Dave Clark (Chair), S. Scott Graham, Rachel Spilka

M.A. in English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2010  
Milwaukee WI

Area of Concentration: Professional Writing

Thesis: "Sexuality and Professional Writing: Notes toward a Queered Professional Writing Pedagogy"

Committee Chair: Dave Clark

B.A. in English, summa cum laude, Lee University, 2007  
Cleveland TN

### SCHOLARSHIP

#### *Publications*

Edenfield, A. (Forthcoming). "Power and Communication in Worker Cooperatives: An Overview." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*.

Andersson, F. and Edenfield (2015). "Nonprofit Governance and the Power of Things." *Nonprofit Quarterly*. Summer 2015. pp. 52-59.

#### *Publications in Progress*

Andersson, F. and Edenfield, A. (2015). "The Social Entrepreneur: Superhero or Villain? Illuminating the Disruptive Nature of Social Entrepreneurship." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*.

Purzycki, K. and Edenfield, A. (2015). "Cataloging Game Experience: An Ecological Approach to Genres of Paratext." *Article Manuscript*.

### *Conference Presentations*

- Andersson, F. and Edenfield, A. (2015, April). The Emergence of the Dominant Coalition: A Case Study of the Riverwest Public House Cooperative. Presented at the Henry W. Bloch School of Management Nonprofit Governance Conference. Kansas City MO.
- Edenfield, A. (2014, October). Cooperatives and Communication: Implications for Business Communication. Presented at the Association for Business Communication Annual International Conference. Philadelphia PA.
- Edenfield, A. (2014, February). New Materialism and Professional Writing Technologies: Avoiding Extreme Usability. Presented at the Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference. Milwaukee WI.
- Edenfield, A. (2011, March). Effeminacy and Morality in Quintilian's On the Teaching of Speaking and Writing. Presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. St. Louis MO.

### *Other Presentations and Workshops*

- Edenfield, A., Purzycki, K, and Houston, B. (2015, November). Archiving Video Game Experience. Workshop for Serious Play. UWM Digital Humanities Lab. Milwaukee WI.
- Edenfield, A. (2015, October). Consensus Decision-making as a Business Model. Workshop for the Executive Committee of the Riverwest-Harambee Credit Union. Milwaukee WI.
- Edenfield, A. and Purzycki, K. (2015, August). Archiving as Advocacy: Cataloguing a Game Experience. Guest Speakers on Screens. Riverwest Public Radio. Milwaukee WI.
- Edenfield, A. (2015, April). Teaching the Rhetoric of Social Media in the Business Writing Classroom. Writing Pedagogy Workshop for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Milwaukee WI.
- Edenfield, A. (2015, February). Riverwest Cooperatives and the Bottom Line: Where Business and Social Values Converge. Presented for the Milwaukee Cooperative Education Series. Milwaukee WI.

## **RESEARCH AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE**

### Writing, Speaking, and Technoscience in the 21st Century (2015 - )

- Research, develop, and teach rhetoric course for engineering students as a part of a Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines campus initiative
- Collaborate with faculty and graduate teaching assistants on course development, training, and mid- and end-of-semester assessments

### WID Engineering Exchange Program, Engineering Materials (Pilot) (2012 - )

- Developed and taught communication curriculum for engineering students alongside lab experimentation

- Coordinated with Engineering, Communication, and English faculty and graduate assistants to ensure success of program, including managing course materials, training on course procedures, and coordinating online components in line with ABET requirements
- Coordinated with Engineering faculty and graduate teaching assistants to ensure congruence between lecture, lab, and communication assignments across 15 labs

Research Assistant to Associate Dean of Humanities (Spring 2015)

- Developed budget models for College of Letters and Science departments including Philosophy, Communication, Economics, Foreign Languages, and Literature
- Established and managed a resource wiki for humanities faculty and advisors to improve enrollment
- Tracked enrollment across humanities courses in order to consolidate courses and boost enrollment in low-attended courses

Research Assistant, Department of English (Fall 2011)

- Revised Professional Writing track website including troubleshooting and testing for usability
- Researched and compiled ideas to improve alumni outreach including newsletter and featured stories

## **PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE**

Assistant Developer, UWM Athletics Department (2015 - )

- Research and develop documents supporting broad fundraising activities including direct mail and online appeals
- Develop content for donor and community partnerships, including letter, email, and web writing

Assistant Researcher, Responsive Writing Solutions (2015)

- Co-wrote proposals for seed funding and grants for software development project
- Conducted and reported market and technical research, including competition reports and interviews

Proposal Developer, Biomedical Engineering Department (Successful) (2014 - 2015)

- Researched and developed proposals for the development of a new Biomedical Engineering Department and authorization of Biomedical Engineering B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees
- Collaborated with engineering faculty and Associate Dean of College of Engineering & Applied Science to create and revise proposals to meet the standards of UW-System Administration requirements

Content Developer, Legal Action Wisconsin (Internship) (2009 - 2010)

- Researched, compiled, and revised organizational legacy documents
- Researched and edited web content including testimonies and case studies for multiple stakeholders

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE

English 310: Writing, Speaking, and Technoscience in the 21st Century (2015 - )

- Contextualize engineering and science studies within technoscience and social problems
- Build and extend oral and written communication skills from previous coursework
- Equip students with more precise tools for analyzing audiences, both technical and non-technical

Business Management 738: Critical and Analytical Thinking (Writing Coach) (2015 - )

- Co-instruct one of only six graduate critical thinking business courses in the U.S.
- Support graduate student learning of communication practices in business management

Materials Science and Engineering 201: Engineering Materials (Communication) (2012 - 2015)

- Facilitated communication assignments alongside experimental work in a materials laboratory
- Focused on presentations, business reports, and other technical correspondence
- Introduced technical, semi-technical, and non-technical audiences

English 206: Technical Writing (GER) (2013 - 2014)

- Focused on technical writing as a rhetorical, social/cultural, problem-solving process
- Introduced memos, presentations, instructions, and software documentation
- Guided students in responding to different contexts and creating graphic and document designs

English 205: Business Writing (GER) (2012 - 2014)

- Facilitated discussions and workshops where students analyze and respond to readings, as well as writing choices in their own work
- Guided students through analyses of cases, employing problem-solving strategies

English 102: College Research and Writing (GER) (2011 - 2012)

- Taught reading and writing as recursive, interdependent processes and interpretive acts
- Introduced students to college research through a sequence of assignments in which students pose and investigate questions in response to their reading of course texts

English 101: Introduction to College English (GER) (2010 - 2011)

- Introduced college writing as a process to freshmen writers
- Asked students to read several challenging texts and to write and revise a significant number of responses to those texts; students submit a portfolio of essays for assessment at end of semester

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

Zeidler Center for Public Discussion, Milwaukee (2015)

*Scholarship for attendance to facilitation training with expectation of community workshop*

Student Success Award, UWM (2014)

*Award recognizing a person UWM students named as someone who helped most in their success*

The New Economy Coalition, National (2014)

*Scholarship for USFWC conference attendance with expectation of community workshop*