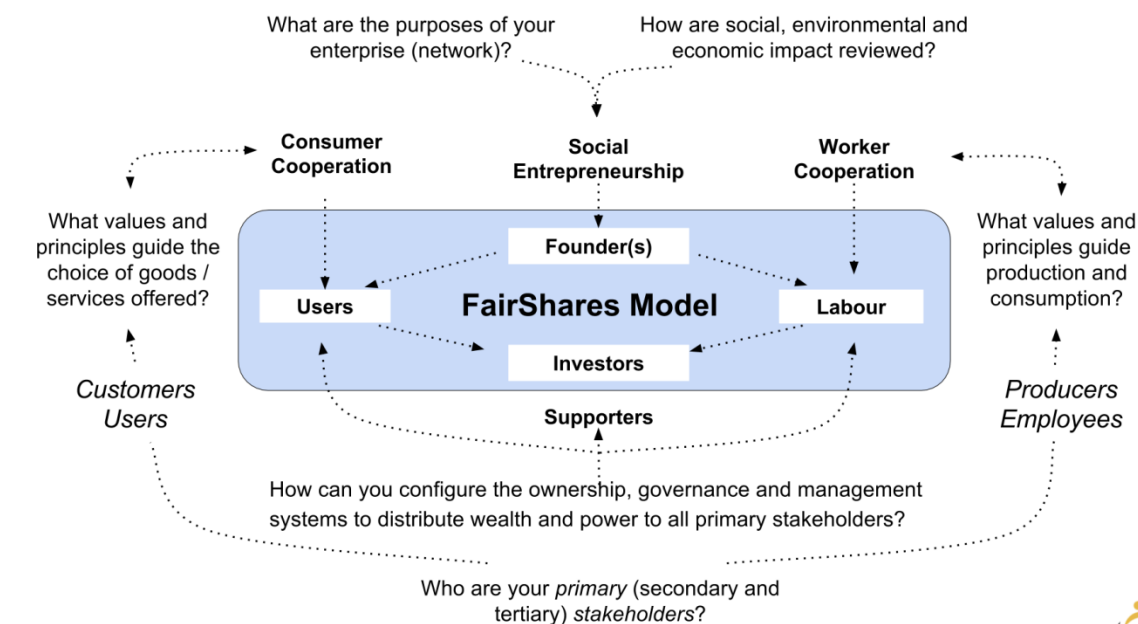


Five Learning and Development Methods

In this document, we look at five learning and development methods that have been used successfully by partners to build participatory democracy in workplaces and community development projects. **In the context of a FairShares Lab**, learning / development methods are essential management skills that elicit answers to 'Six Key Questions' and promote five principles of co-operative learning. Answering these questions in a way that is accountable, inclusive and responsive to stakeholder opinions is not straightforward. The five learning / development methods described each have a different role to play in building local democracy (based on accountability to the governed). Their adoption supports **holacracy** in which participation takes place in overlapping self-managing teams that collaborate to reach decisions.

Who can answer the key questions needed to plan an enterprise?



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Answering the key questions

Knowing what questions need answering is not the same as knowing who is best positioned to answer each question. For example, questions about relevance (and social purposes) are best addressed by founder members in collaboration with potential product/services users. Users are particularly well placed to consider which products/services they would use, and the ethical, social and environmental impacts from their use. However, once we consider questions regarding feasibility, other groups are better placed. Providers of labour (suppliers, producers, employees) are better positioned to answer questions about production processes and their contribution to the social goals of the enterprise. Providers of finance capital may be better able to work out the feasibility of financial plans and economic assumptions. The figure above summarises how a successful implementation of the FairShares Model involves each stakeholder to review answers to specific questions they are well placed to answer. The following five learning and development methods are effective ways of working with each stakeholder group, or bringing together stakeholders to take decisions.

1. Living Labs (User-led multi-stakeholding)

The Living Lab¹ is a core learning method for a FairShares Lab. It brings potential users of a product or service into the same space as those who can produce and fund it. Living Labs, therefore, start from the same multi-stakeholder assumptions as the [FairShares Model](#). Living Labs tend to be organised geographically, in districts, regions and cities, to promote *co-production* of community services. A FairShares Lab deploys Living Labs to design social enterprises that act as community services. Living Labs, theoretically, are an attempt to realise New Public Governance by drawing on a sociological / network view of design processes to achieve vocal plurality during decision-making. Whilst other participatory techniques are linked, Living Labs place more emphasis on experiential learning and practical engagement in design and testing.

2. Social Auditing (Inclusive strategizing)

While Living Labs place an emphasis on the early stages of enterprise creation, social auditing comes later in the enterprise life cycle. It is an inclusive process for reviewing, updating and developing a governance system collaboratively. Pioneered in the 1980s by Freer Spreckley², it was further developed with Cliff Southcombe throughout the 1990s as a methodology for social enterprises to improve both their internal governance and responsiveness to the local community. Social auditing has its own learning cycle that starts by exploring the values that underpin a system of governance, which then progresses to comparing internal and external stakeholder views of the outcomes achieved. The process requires a commitment to publishing social accounts that can be scrutinised by stakeholders. **In a FairShares Lab**, social auditing can examine whether the ‘Five FairShares Values and Principles’ are operationalised to the satisfaction of stakeholders, and also identify local values and principles that need to be monitored in that context.

All variants of the FairShares Rules (from v2.x onwards) include a clause committing members to social auditing once a member threshold has been reached. Clause 47(b)(iii) calls for an:

“audit of the internal democracy and decision-making of the [legal form], the wages, health and safety, skill sharing and educational opportunities of its members and employees, or other matters concerning the overall personal or job satisfaction of members and employees; an assessment of the [legal form]’s activities externally, including effects on people, the environment and other organisations.”

Both Living Labs and social auditing are more likely to thrive when people are included in learning and reviewing the effectiveness of processes. The next three learning and development methods provide a skillset for effectively engaging people in group deliberations. Each technique enables people to feel heard and included in learning and decision-making processes. We start with action learning (and appreciative inquiry), then move onto Open Space and finishing with OPERA and World Cafe. All the techniques work with small, medium or large groups to promote cooperative learning and decision-making.

3. Action Learning/Appreciative Inquiry (Learning by discovery and doing)

Action learning takes place in learning sets: small groups (normally about 6 people) deliberate on issues or problems brought to the group by its members. In the learning set, members reflect on the actions they have taken, or could take, in the future.³ Learning is focussed on individual development with group support - issues and topics brought by everyone to the learning set prompt other members to

¹ See the special issue of [Technology Innovation Management Review](#) devoted to Living Labs, Sept 2012

² See Spreckley, F. (2008) ‘[The Social Audit Toolkit](#) (4th Edition)’, Local Livelihoods: St Oswald’s Barn.

³ See Pedlar, M., Brook, C., Burgoyne, J. (2005) ‘[What has action learning learnt to become?](#)’, *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 2(1): 49-68.

ask clarifying questions (rather than judge or evaluate). Good questions stimulate reflection by the person who introduced the issue. In combination with Appreciative Inquiry⁴ - which focuses on moving through a cycle of discovery and design to support learning - these techniques provide an alternative mode of learning that confronts the complexities of social situations and technical challenges. **In the context of a FairShares Lab**, learning sets are useful for working through individual challenges faced by lab members. Whilst action learning is not appropriate for strategic planning, in combination with Appreciative Inquiry it can be. It can also be combined with Open Space, World Cafe and OPERA (see below) to work with larger groups.

4. Open Space and World Café (Learning through interactive dialogue)

Based on a set of assumptions about learning that are like learning sets - but focussing more on large group interactions - Open Space Technology is a method for groups of people to develop knowledge about one or more challenges facing the group in a relatively short space of time. It requires little preparation beforehand because topics are advanced during the session by group members. It can also be used to organise research days where research topics are not selected in advance, but chosen on the day.

World Cafe, on the other hand, revolves around well-defined topics or questions selected in advance. These could be set 'top-down' by an entrepreneur, manager or 'bottom-up' using a group process like OPERA (see below). **In a FairShares Lab context**, Open Space fits well with the participant-led (user-led) selection of ideas, and both Open Space and World Cafe are good for breaking down an issue into sub-topics for small group discussion. If used to support enterprise creation, notetakers (with a camera) can capture the results of sub-groups' deliberations and create a conference report quickly. With appropriate resourcing, Open Space and World Cafe can generate responses to complex problems in a short space of time. Their strength lies in support for intensive engaging discussion in small groups.

5. OPERA (Participatory decision-making)

For this reason, the last learning and development method introduced is decision-making with OPERA (own ideas, pairing, explaining, ranking and arranging). Pioneered by Innotiimi,⁵ it has been adopted in social enterprise development work. Recently, it was studied as a process that can support Appreciative Inquiry in medium-sized groups.⁶ Unlike Action Learning and Open Space, OPERA is oriented towards collective decision-making where many ideas are generated, then filtered, by a group of people. Unlike other group techniques, people work initially on their own, then in pairs, before they present ideas to the rest of the group. A 'ranking' phase promotes participatory democracy (members vote for preferred proposals). The final 'arranging' phase is a form of action planning.

In short, OPERA progresses ideas so that practical action can be taken. It is more effective than Action Learning, Appreciative Inquiry or Open Space when group decisions are needed. **In the context of a FairShares Lab**, OPERA can be useful for generating and selecting enterprise ideas, or to set the agenda for an Open Space or World Cafe session.

Once stakeholders can clarify the relevance, feasibility and sustainability of a potential enterprise (network), the legal frameworks that will provide the best support can be considered. It is important that legal identities are driven by values, principles and social enterprise model considerations together because each legal model enables and constrains how a social enterprise model can be operationalised. After using these learning and development techniques to develop a FairShares Canvass, the impact of four legal options (companies, co-operatives, partnerships and associations) can be considered to understand how legal frameworks will impact on the achievement of purpose(s).

⁴ See Ridley-Duff, R. and Duncan, G. (2015) '[What is critical appreciation?](#)', *Human Relations*, 68(10): 1577-99.

⁵ See [Innotiimi's 'best practice' page](#) for suggested readings on OPERA.

⁶ See Ridley-Duff, R. and Grant, S. (2016) '[Asset-based co-operative management](#): OPERA as a form of critical appreciation', paper to 2016 ISIRC Conference, Glasgow.