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SEEDING

Social Economy Enterprises addressing Digitalisation,
Industrial relations and the European Pillar of Social Rights



**CASE STUDY
SPAIN**

Suara Cooperativa



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Suara Cooperativa



NAME OF THE PRACTICE	DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF SUARA COOPERATIVA
Responsible actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management (with the involvement of workers)
Type of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • business plan • company internal regulation • other - Digital Transformation Plan (PTD) that impacts the entire organisation
Challenges addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • automation of work • platform work
Employment impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job retention • skills and training • working time • work organisation and work-life balance • employee monitoring • equal opportunities

Geographical coverage	The company is active mainly in Catalonia, but also in Castilla la Mancha, and in Santiago de Chile. The cooperative provides services in multiple municipalities. The unemployment rate is 10.45%, many of the unemployed being low-skilled people. The level of qualification in the sector is typically medium-low.
Sectoral coverage	<p>Sectors where Suara is active:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social services • education and training • personal welfare • employment and work <p>After the 2007 crisis, large construction companies decided to invest in the personal care sector, which created employment (for people dependent on the underground economy) and generating high competition in the sector, but also providing services less closely linked to the community.</p>
Company coverage	<p>Suara is organised as a non-profit social initiative cooperative and has more than 35 years of experience in providing personal care over people's the whole life cycles. The company works in social services, care for dependents, children and families, wellness and health, elderly care, education and training, employment and work, and other fields.</p> <p>It follows a networked organisational model to adapt its services to specific needs, with each of its services and projects being supported by central functions.</p> <p>Its organisational structure is governed by the assembly of members of the cooperative, which is the highest decision-making body. Nine members are members of the governing board, which oversees the work of the general management.</p> <p>This organisational form favours the empowerment of all the staff, through a governance model that promotes direct participation in day-to-day decision-making. Currently, SUARA provides services to more than 46,500 people in Catalonia (data refers to 2018).</p>
Occupational coverage	<p>SUARA manages a wide range of services and structures, including residential facilities, schools and educational centres, counselling services, prevention and support services and home services.</p> <p>It employs more than 4,960 professionals, mainly social educators, teachers, job counsellors, nurses, teachers, physical therapists and family workers.</p> <p>1,147 workers are members of the cooperative.</p>
Workforce addressed	<p>Women constitute the overwhelming majority of workers (90%).</p> <p>The age range of workers varies quite widely, and also depends on the service and profession. The training requirements in the sector are usually medium low to be able to work.</p>
ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ACTION	
Company management	Yes

Worker members of the cooperative at large	Yes
Works councils	Yes
Trade unions	Yes
Employers' organisations	No
NGO	No
Public authority	No
DESCRIPTION	
Rationale for the adoption of the practice	<p>When strategic planning was developed in 2014, one of the main priorities was how to adapt to digital changes.</p> <p>Some changes were simply thought to be helpful in developing the cooperative, whilst others were considered necessary due to the specific features of the sector, especially growing competition.</p>
Process of the adoption of the practice	<p>The cooperative carried out a change management project approved in 2015 within the strategic plan. All workers were involved. The information was transparent. Workers were informed and evaluations were made.</p> <p>Specific working teams are created, releasing workers from their ordinary duties to focus exclusively on the change management process. The aim of this was to make all workers feel comfortable with technology. The cooperative focused on this from the beginning.</p> <p>External consultants are also present to support implementation. These consultancy services are not intended for individuals (although consultants are used for the training processes).</p>
Description of the practice	<p>The company created a Digital Transformation Office to promote the development of the Digital Transformation Plan. It is made up of the IT director, the innovation director, the digital transformation director, and includes a Business area and a Marketing area.</p> <p>Weekly meetings are held, by specific projects and areas for implementation. The office coordinates the activities and evaluates advantages and weaknesses.</p> <p>In particular, the following innovations are being introduced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Information Technology Area (which did not exist as such), with a specific focus on Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). This includes aspects concerning digital devices, connectivity and the development of web applications; • Changes in communication channels with clients through web environments where clients can monitor the activity of workers; • Creation of the DECIDIM ('We decide') app: This is about promoting participation through more agile participation debates. 100 Mentor Members (experts) tutor new members who join the cooperative;

- ERP change: On the intranet, all workers can consult all their data with the cooperative in real time, providing greater transparency and equal opportunities;
- Launch of a digital cooperative platform (expected in 2020).

As to the last point, the cooperative deems many services will soon be sold on digital platforms and intends to be prepared to compete in this arena.

Talks are also in progress with foreign players, with a view to understanding how the cooperative model can 'humanise' platforms. There is also the idea to involve consumers as members of the cooperative. In this way users of care services can request workers with the necessary characteristics. The platform will help to match the requests with the workers, on the basis of criteria and the values of the cooperative. The adoption of a platform is expected to improve working conditions, and, by generating more demand for services, to increase employment.

Suara had to carry out specific training in the use of ERP tools and in the use of patient monitoring applications for less qualified workers.

Dismissed alternatives

None

ASSESSMENT

IMPACT OF THE PRACTICE ON:

Job stability and secure employment

The cooperative faced risks of job losses due to overall market conditions and competition but it managed to avoid layoffs.

Skills needs and training

Yes. Specific training was provided in ERP software (SAP) and in the use of applications.

Working conditions

Working time has decreased and performance has improved. There is an increase in value.

Mobile phones update work calendars automatically and therefore there is an improvement in work organisation. The worker is not geolocated. However in the case of home care services to dependent people they have to confirm their actual presence in the user's home. This is generating perceptions of excessive control and stress, and also triggering a strong debate with unions.

In nursery schools, teachers had fears of excessive control by the users. There have been no incidents until now.

Pilot tests have been made where users have the workers' phone numbers but no calls have ever been received outside business hours. There is no extra control by users (a rate of one call per month).

No harm to health has been detected, nor has the practice seemed to affect equal opportunities.

Company performance

The company plan addresses the challenge of economic efficiency ahead of digital transformations. The introduction of new systems is enabling growth, productivity, and improved communication and performance overall.

At the same time, the development of a cooperative platform is meant to answer new demands while staying competitive. While enabling users to select the workers, the platform will ensure compliance with cooperative principles and with the terms of employment agreed by the cooperative.

Overall strengths and weaknesses	<p>Strengths:</p> <p>The representative governing council and the board of directors are clear about the process and embarked in a participative process.</p> <p>Weaknesses:</p> <p>The implementation of IT solutions (ERP) requires a lot of effort, time and money, as any extra requirement compared to standard services implies additional costs. At the same time, large non-cooperative competitors are better equipped in terms of financial resources. There is a strong effort by the cooperative to provide the necessary training but this is also meeting some resistance to change.</p>
Overall opportunities and threats	<p>Opportunities:</p> <p>‘Digital business efficiency’ can generate synergies with clients and administrations.</p> <p>Threats:</p> <p>Competition from large multinationals represents a serious threat as these companies are better equipped to invest and adapt to digital transformation.</p>
Potential for social partners and collective bargaining to upscale/transfer the practice	<p>The digitisation process in Suara was a decision of the cooperative itself, based on market considerations. As such the unions have not participated in decision-making, but have supported workers in the few cases where they reported some difficulties.</p> <p>Yet, as such changes are part of global trends, unions should have the ability to discuss these processes and propose concrete solutions answering new and specific problems posed by new technologies.</p>
Potential for public authorities to support upscaling/ transferring the practice	<p>There was little help from the public administration. The provision of subsidies, interest-free loans or incentives for vocational training could help and influence digitalisation processes.</p>
List of annexes, sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with company representatives.
Company website	https://www.suara.coop/en

The case study was prepared by: **COCETA (Spain).**