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SEEDING

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



**CASE
STUDY
FRANCE**

ouishare

ouishare

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NAME OF THE PRACTICE	
NAME OF THE PRACTICE	OUISHARE
Responsible actor	workers
Type of practice	- code of conduct - business plan
Challenges addressed	platform work
Employment impact	- job retention - skills and training - work organisation and work-life balance - health and safety at work - equal opportunities - flexibility at work
Geographical coverage	ouishare is a global network of activists exploring the ‘edges’ of innovation in the fields of collaboration and the impacts of technology on society. ouishare ‘members’ and ‘connectors’ (people actively participating) live in 18 countries (see map) but are especially active in six of them: France, Spain, Canada, Germany, Brazil and Columbia.

Sectoral coverage	ouishare members and connectors are mainly freelancers in the fields of consulting (collaborative governance and work practices), workshop facilitation, project management and research. In some ways, ouishare can be considered as a platform as it generates interactions between people and organisations, which can bring in business opportunities. Whereas classic platforms centralise the match-making between customers and suppliers, taking a share of every transaction, ouishare can be considered as a catalyst for collaboration. Besides, ouishare is collectively governed by its stakeholders, whereas classic platforms are economic actors themselves, acting in their own economic interest.
Company coverage	The ouishare community claims more than 100 active members globally. Being a ouishare member or connector generates revenue for approximately 40 people globally, but it is rarely their main source of income. The main and historical community is based in France (Paris). Barcelona is also an active hub of ouishare contributors. Regarding the French community: • the ouishare brand is owned by the French ouishare association; • all French ouishare connectors are directors of the association; • the association makes its decisions digitally using the application Loomio; • the association is the only shareholder of the ouishare company (ouishare Société par Actions Simplifiées) which is used for commercial projects (such as consultancy or event production); • the association is also linked to a foundation (to receive donations for specific projects); • the association is one of the founding members of ‘Resilience by ouishare’, a consultancy cooperative created by members of the community around the specific topic of collaborative governance consultancy. ouishare is in the process of changing its legal status, in order to simplify this structure. Global governance: • Some of the local communities (Canada and Spain for instance) have created their own associations in order to manage funds. • All connectors use Loomio for decision-making at the international level (decisions impacting the ouishare brand).
Occupational coverage	The French association has only one employee (administrative management) and multiple external workers (members and connectors of the community). Their main occupations are business developers, project managers, researchers and event organisers. The association may occasionally hire workers, for instance to comply with the requirements of European projects.
Workforce addressed	Workers in the French ouishare community are mainly young (less than 35 years old) and well educated (average level: Master’s degree).

ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ACTION

Company management	No
Worker members of the cooperative at large	Yes
Works councils	No
Trade unions	No
Employers' organisations	No
NGO	No
Public authority	No

DESCRIPTION

Rationale for the adoption of the practice	The majority of people who created ouishare belong to a generation of young workers who believe in achieving a deep impact and want their jobs to have meaning. They were deeply inspired by David Graeber's work on 'bullshit jobs'. They have created the conditions to work without the hierarchy they disapprove of, and ensured their right to influence the decisions which affect their work and their reputation. They have created an organisation embodying their objectives of horizontal hierarchy enabled by new digital tools.
Process of the adoption of the practice	The decision-making process that has been created with the organisation reflects the values of horizontal collaboration. Genesis: the 'rule of the 3' At the very beginning of the organisation, the main value of the community formed by the connectors was 'do-ocracy'. This neologism means that the priority is given to initiatives and that minimum organisational barriers should prevent a good idea from being realised. Consequently, the first organisational rule which is documented is the 'rule of the 3', inspired by the democratic organisations of Caribbean pirates: if 3 connectors are OK about undertaking an action, they can do it. As connectors are themselves co-opted by three other connectors (you have to convince at least three connectors that your project within the community is compatible with the values of ouishare), basic alignment between action and community values is ensured. Decision-making through Loomio As concerns critical decisions engaging the brand, which is the image of every connector who acts as a ouishare ambassador in his or her country, debate and consent is the rule. Consent differs from consensus as the community of connectors does not seek everyone's agreement for every action, because this would take too much time and energy. Instead they put trust and transparency at the heart of their actions.

Even if decisions can have various timing, a classical process is:

- If a team (in a specific city or country, or around a specific vertical sector) is about to take a strong position or undertake a significant action (organising a major event, making an important partnership with a private company, etc.), it documents it on Loomio, creating a topic and describing the action, its context and the implications for the community;
- For the next two weeks, other connectors can react on the topic;
- In the vast majority of cases, the debate brings out any worries and the proposition is adapted;
- If needed, a vote is held. The need is not to achieve a majority but to ensure that nobody disagrees. This means that every member of the community has a veto;
- The topic is saved and remains available for further consultation on the platform. This leaves a trace of the decision and the arguments that have been used to justify it. It can be re-opened if needed.

Examples of decision processes where this veto rule has been useful:

- Organising the ouishare fest (the major event of the community) has provided an opportunity to invite the mayors of the main global big cities. One local community vetoed the invitation of their mayor because they felt that his politics clashed with ouishare's values;
- The community has blocked the signing of partnerships or the acceptance of business propositions from organisations in the oil and gas industry.

To ensure that do-ocracy prevails and that actions are not continually blocked by people who are no longer aligned with the community, connectors have to go through an 'opt-in' process each year, during which they have to say if and why they want to remain a connector or become an alumnus/alumna.

Some of the decisions of the community are published through the [Loomio/ouishare](#) portal. As Loomio's functionalities evolve, the way it is used changes, but the main objective remains transparency to stakeholders.

Description of the practice

While it brings in revenues for more than 20 workers in France, ouishare has no employees. All workers involved are freelancers and therefore, there is no formal hierarchical relationship among them.

Teams organise themselves depending on commercial opportunities. Recruitment among the community can be done through a public call for participation on the Loomio digital tool, or it can follow informal relationships between people.

Even if horizontal hierarchy is the rule for general decision-making, operational teams in projects can organise themselves in various ways, enabling fast and centralised decisions if needed.

Being a project manager does not bring formal access to power or more weight in decision-making in the future. Being a leader today does not mean that you will lead a new team tomorrow.

Working on interesting projects (which are the most impactful or financially rewarding) depends only on the ability to prove that the worker has the right competences and level of engagement.

Business agreement:

Every project has a specific way of dividing the revenues of the mission, but in the majority of cases:

- 10% is for the business developer
- between 70 % and 80% is divided between workers
- between 10% and 20% is kept is for the administration of the ouishare brand and the funding of internal projects (this amount can be challenged regarding the importance of the brand for the negotiation)

It should be noted that ouishare is experimenting with the use of Cobudget, a digital tool to co-finance projects within the organisation (a form of internal crowdfunding). For instance, this method might be used to organise an event in a new country, where financial partners have not been identified yet.

Rating system: Human after all

The rating system of the community is a major difference between ouishare and other actors related to platform work.

A platform is either a free marketplace where a client can find a good or a service based on its needs and led by the comments/ratings of earlier consumers, or it is an economic actor which 'chooses' the supplier for the customer, based on an algorithm which is fed by some data (rating, geographical position, competencies, etc.).

The ouishare community differentiates itself by trying to keep humanity in every relationship. So every worker increases his or her reputation by doing well in a project and making it known to other potential partners.

This is why the community gathers together regularly and physically: global ouishare summits are held twice a year for connectors, and ouishare fests and events occur regularly in the various countries. These events enable members to get to know each other better and create professional interactions. No algorithm is used to match people and no rating system is set up to objectivise their competencies.

Nevertheless, ouishare has experimented with using BackFeed, a digital tool based on the blockchain, embodying the principles of peer-to-peer relations (based on transparent feedback), whose objective was to collect feedback about collaborations within communities. This experiment has been stopped and judged as a failure. The main reasons are that people did not give 'real' feedback (all feedback was positive so did not enable discrimination in a selection process), and some people did not give feedback at all.

Complaints:

There are no tools or processes specifically to address complaints. Problems in the community are often debated at ouishare summits (physical meetings twice a year) which can lead to changes in the organisation of specific projects.

Dismissed alternatives	The ouishare company could have worked only with employed workers and have created a formal hierarchy between them, based on competence and experience. This practice has been dismissed because ouishare has mainly been created to experiment with different ways of interacting in a business perspective, based on peer-to-peer relations, in a fluid and informal hierarchy.
ASSESSMENT	
IMPACT OF THE PRACTICE ON:	
Job stability and secure employment	Workers do not benefit from the stability and security of employment.
Skills needs and training	Workers need a high level of autonomy and strong social competences in order to join the groups working on the subjects they target. ouishare does not provide any formal training, but the experience of working within ouishare can be considered as training for the very fast acquisition of competency in the rules of peer-to-peer interaction. This is why a lot of ouishare workers are also consultants in horizontal governance. It should be noted that at some point projects have emerged within ouishare to provide more training to workers, for instance an 'incubator for people' which was a six-month programme to develop various skills (generally related to soft skills and self-positioning in the community).
Working conditions	This practice seems to create a high degree of equality of opportunity, as no worker can install him or herself in a position that guarantees interesting jobs. If a worker has the right competencies for a mission and can prove it, he or she can have access to the best opportunities. There is no specific process to ensure this behaviour in the long run. Conflicts are often debated at ouishare summits and if some people are no longer aligned with ouishare's core values, the opt-in process is a way for them to take distance themselves from the community. Nevertheless, this lack of fast conflict resolution may be a weakness of the organisation. Workers are responsible for the major part of their working conditions, especially as regards work-life balance. Workers are responsible for the negotiation of their revenues, although many projects try to implement fair pay rules (based on involvement for instance).
Company performance	The first years of ouishare, especially in France (where the main community is active) were underwritten by large financial partnerships. These partnerships were sufficient for a core team to secure its revenues, and they have been able to animate the global community of workers. Since 2018 and the end of these partnerships (and the departure of some of the original leaders for other entrepreneurial ventures), ouishare's activities have been less intense and visible, and this created a need to reinforce links with other partners, such as public institutions. Ouishare also had to experiment with new ways of working (more research and consultancy and less event organisation, for instance).

	Nevertheless, this year, ouishare has announced its wish to organise a new ouishare fest – the major event which provided good revenues for the community but has not been held since 2017.
Overall strengths and weaknesses	• The organisation of work reflects the ideals of self-determination of workers; • This practice is very attractive to young and well-educated professionals who seek autonomy and meaningful jobs. It brings the best competencies to the organisation; • This practice is fluid, it enables vertical hierarchy for short decision-making processes when it is needed and at the same time it gives space for deep democratic processes; • This practice enables a large community to collaborate on profit-making or non-profit missions and to commit themselves depending on their current needs. But: • This practice leaves space for informal power. Even if no formal position is attributed, workers recognise expertise and seniority in others. In such a changing environment, the process of gaining power is unclear and can be frustrating; • Pay is not public and new workers have little information on which to negotiate their income. This situation can generate mistrust; • This practice fits mostly with highly-skilled and highly-educated young workers, which does not foster diversity in the teams; • Paying workers only for commercial projects affects the capacity to incentivise involvement in internal subjects, and in the community. For ouishare to be able to incentivise internal work (animating the network, reshaping the internal governance, organising a seminar for connectors, etc.), the brand should be allocated a higher share when revenue is divided. This situation can be frustrating for workers who work for the collective (working for internal projects is mainly voluntary).
Overall opportunities and threats	Opportunities: • Meaningful work and a light hierarchy is very attractive to young talented workers. Threats: • This practice does not bring security to workers. It may meet the needs of the youngest workers but most of them have to find work in other organisations after several years (when the time comes to buy a house or to take parental leave); • This organisation can work in a situation of financial abundance, but the post-Covid economic crisis and the decrease of opportunities might impact the capacity of the organisation to attract talent.
Potential for social partners and collective bargaining to upscale/transfer the practice	Some ouishare workers have created an alternative organisation, 'Resiliences by ouishare', which is a cooperative specialising in consultancy services in the field of collaborative governance. The ouishare association is a founding member of this organisation, and its creation therefore followed a democratic process in the ouishare association.

	The strength of ‘Resiliences by ouishare’ is to bring more formality to governance, without forsaking democratic principles. The workers are still freelancers, but they are also cooperators. They own their work instrument and they have the power to change the management if needed (unlike in the ouishare association or company, there is a management which drives the general direction of the cooperative). Currently, ‘Resiliences by ouishare’ is experimenting with the governance model of ‘holacracy’, which implies formal circles of governance with communication responsibilities between the circles. Ouishare did not formalise a similar governance system for internal discussion (apart from the use of Loomio at a global level), which can be frustrating for people who want to get involved in internal discussion but do not find a way to express themselves.
Potential for public authorities to support upscaling/ transferring the practice	n/a
List of annexes, sources	• Cut the bullshit: organizations with no hierarchy don’t exist • http://opensource.ouishare.net/ • https://resiliences.co/a-propos/
Company website	https://www.ouishare.net/

The case study was prepared by: Alexandre Bigot-Verdier (France) /Diesis Network (Belgium).