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## **Visión sistémica de la gestión del conocimiento en el sector financiero cooperativo**

### **Systemic vision of knowledge management in the cooperative financial sector**

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## **RESUMEN**

Las empresas han puesto la mirada en sus fortalezas y las utiliza para apalancar el posicionamiento de marca, las ventas, la productividad y rentabilidad. Las entidades de servicios financieros se encuentran dentro del grupo de empresas orientadas a desarrollar un conocimiento colectivo para que su know how no desaparezca cuando un colaborador deja el equipo, por esta razón, el presente artículo tiene como propósito investigar cómo se está manejando la gestión del conocimiento en la Cooperativa de Ahorro y Crédito Jardín Azuayo y si cuenta con las condiciones para aplicar planes de sucesión dentro de su estructura organizativa. La investigación se ejecutó bajo un diseño no experimental con enfoque mixto y análisis cualitativo y cuantitativo; aplicando

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técnicas de investigación como la encuesta dirigida a los empleados de la entidad y entrevistas a funcionarios de alto rango. Los resultados han permitido generar una propuesta de aplicación en la cooperativa.

**Descriptores:** Economía de la empresa; recursos humanos; gestión del personal; organización del trabajo. (Palabras tomadas del Tesauro UNESCO).

## ABSTRACT

Companies have set their sights on their strengths and used them to leverage brand positioning, sales, productivity and profitability. Financial services entities are within the group of companies aimed at developing collective knowledge so that their know-how does not disappear when a collaborator leaves the team, for this reason, this article aims to investigate how knowledge management is being managed in the Azuayo Garden Savings and Credit Cooperative and if it has the conditions to apply succession plans within its organizational structure. The research was carried out under a non-experimental design with a mixed approach and qualitative and quantitative analysis; applying investigation techniques such as the survey addressed to the entity's employees and interviews with high-ranking officials. The results have generated a proposal for application in the cooperative.

**Descriptors:** Business economics; Human resources; Personnel management; Work organization. (Words taken from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

## INTRODUCTION

The cooperative movement has been one of the managers that has guided the visibility of the popular-solidarity economy and its different forms of organization and has also achieved its inclusion in the new constitution of 2008 together with the public and private sector as part of the national financial system.

The savings and credit cooperative has been one of the segments with a great growth in recent years. According to information taken from the SEPS, the popular and solidarity financial sector registers assets of 15,459 million dollars as of November 2019, reaching approximately 25% of the total of the national financial system and contributing very significantly to small economies and leveraging enterprises. Due to this evolution of financial cooperatives, the SEPS control entity has classified the cooperatives into 5 segments according to the size of their assets.

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The largest savings and credit cooperatives, grouped in segment 1, concentrate 71.83% of the total assets respect to the popular and solidarity financial sector. In addition, these 33 entities group 71.46% of the total balances of loans granted until 2018. On the other hand, savings and credit cooperatives maintain annual revenues of more than 1,600 million dollars. Also, more than 7 million Ecuadorians are members in cooperatives, registering more than 11,990 million dollars in savings; the trust gained gives them a great impact on the national economic system, representing great competition for banks. Within the province of Azuay, the two largest financial entities in segment 1 are domiciled: Juventud Ecuatoriana Progresista (JEP) Cooperative and Jardín Azuayo Cooperative, which have assets of approximately 2,500 million dollars, representing 22% of the segment in large cooperatives. Also in segment 2, 6 cooperatives are domiciled in Azuay: La Merced, Santa Isabel, Alfonso Jaramillo, ERCO, COPAC-AUSTRO, CREA (SEPS, 2019).

In the city of Cuenca we can find the parent company of the Jardín Azuayo savings and credit cooperative; this financial entity was formed in May 1996 which opened its first office in the Paute canton. It focused its management on the signing of agreements to obtain development funds and thus expand its coverage in Azuay and Cañar. Later, during the first ten years of operation, the Jardín Azuayo cooperative had twenty-two agencies and approximately 65,000 members.

Currently, the Jardín Azuayo savings and credit cooperative has agencies on the coast, mountains and the east distributed in 56 offices, more than 500,000 members and maintains its social and financial vision, in which its priority is the application of individual and group credit methodologies. Its basic principles indicate the freedom, participation and appreciation of people for their condition of a social being that requires living in community; "Where the main thing is the democratic control that implies a process of teamwork in a network and seeks spaces and channels that allow an effective participation of partners, managers and employees" (Orellana, 2009, p. 15).

Although the Jardín Azuayo cooperative has positioned itself in Ecuador as the second in size of assets and has stood out for its experience of cooperativism related to

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universal values and principles, its growth means great institutional challenges related to the continuity of the entity . The main situations they present are: weak induction and re-induction processes for personnel, lack of updating of the position profile manual and weak processes for delegation of responsibilities; for this reason, it is necessary to carry out this research to promote knowledge management within the cooperative through the implementation of succession plans with the purpose of transferring competencies, skills and abilities to the staff, strengthening responsibilities and enhancing leadership in their collaborators, so that they may be able to assume key positions within the institution.

## **METHOD**

The research is non-experimental and mixed. The quantitative aspect was developed by collecting information statistically and the qualitative one allowed the researchers to develop an experiential relationship with the object of study (Aldana-Zavala, 2019). The inductive-deductive method was also used to organize company data for generating general conclusions based on the information collected.

The research reached a descriptive - explanatory scope, since the concepts raised were described and explained. Regarding the collection techniques, surveys were used. The sample consisted of 245 employees belonging to the Jardín Azuayo credit union.

## **RESULTS**

Important information has been collected by the use of investigation instruments applied to collaborators of the Jardín Azuayo cooperative and Jubones 2 Territory. The results are as follows:

### **General understanding of knowledge management**

The investigated institution has based its development on the constant generation of knowledge. Therefore, the participants in this study were consulted if they were familiar with knowledge management; in this respect, 74.3% of the employees indicated that they recognize this concept, while 25.7% stated that they did not know about the

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subject; similarly, it was inquired whether the cooperative applies knowledge management, in this regard, 61.6% affirmed that it was applied, while 38.4% expressed that this concept was not applied.

### **Human capital**

Within the institutional philosophy of Jardín Azuayo, the human being is located as the center of all actions. In relation to this, another item was focused on the following: the development of human capital has been managed or was being worked in the institution, at this point, 87.7% of the respondents stated that the institution provided opportunities for professional development and growth, specifically, 41.4% strongly agreed and 46.3% agreed. However, this is an aspect that should be reviewed, since 9% of the respondents were indifferent to this aspect, 2.5% disagreed and 0.8% strongly disagreed, reaching 12.3% of employees who believed that the cooperative did not offer them this opportunity; an aspect that is closely related to this topic.

It was also asked whether Jardín Azuayo had been preparing its staff to assume new responsibilities; in this case, 24.9% employees strongly agreed and 45.3% agreed with this statement; however, 15.9% were indifferent to this argument, 10.6% disagreed and 3.3% stated that they totally disagreed. Therefore, actions must be taken to correct this situation and improve this perception.

In addition, within the human capital issue, it was investigated whether this resource existed to assume new responsibilities, finding that 36.7% strongly agreed and 46.1% agreed that the institution had staff prepared for this challenge; on the other hand, 13.5% were indifferent and 3.7% disagreed; within this statement, nobody was "strongly disagree".

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## **Structural capital**

An organization closely linked to the development of people, has undoubtedly generated a flow of information, experiences and data, leading to collective knowledge, which becomes the essential input for innovation. To assess the structural capital, the employees were asked about the exchange of ideas in the entity; with respect to this item, 31% strongly agreed, 55.9% agreed, 9.4% were indifferent, 3.3% disagreed and 0.4% expressed that they strongly disagreed. Although the results are positive, it seems that these processes should be reviewed to involve more people in this dynamic.

To assess this area, it was examined if the institution had tools that allowed sharing knowledge; the results of this revealed that 69% of collaborators agreed with this statement, while 31% said that these utilities did not exist. This result showed the need to clarify knowledge management concepts and relate them to the activities in which people participate.

As innovation has been a transcendental element in the life of a company, it was inquired about the alternation in leadership positions, obtaining that 38.8% of the employees strongly agreed and 50.2% of them agreed with this proposal; 6.5% were indifferent; 4.1 disagreed and 0.4% strongly disagreed, showing that there was acceptance for changes in team leadership. Within this process, an attempt was also made to assess how succession was assimilated within the cooperative and the importance given to this process within the area of human talent; according to this, the following data was obtained: 48.2% of the employees strongly agreed and 44.9% considered this process important; but 4.5% were indifferent, 2% disagreed and 0.4% strongly disagreed. All these data showed us that the institution had extensive collective knowledge, which pointed towards innovation; besides, there was openness to succession and they considered it relevant to work in it.

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### **Relational capital**

Although the abilities, knowledge and skills that exist in the entity must be analyzed, the cooperative must also analyze its capacity to apply these processes, which, far from being simple, can be counterproductive if they are not handled in a timely and responsible manner. Along these lines, the level of adaptation to these processes was investigated, requesting an assessment of the following statement: the succession would contribute to maintaining identity in the institution, in relation to this, 41.2% strongly agreed and 46, 9% agreed; however, 7.3% were indifferent; 3.7% disagreed and 0.8% strongly disagreed. These data showed us that at least 88.1% considered that the institutional idiosyncrasy would not be affected by a succession process.

Also, in this dimension, it was investigated whether it was positive to implement succession plans; in this case, 39.6% indicated that they strongly agreed, while 45.7% showed that they were in agreement to the statement; in addition, 9% were indifferent and 5.7% said that they disagreed. In this analysis, nobody strongly disagreed, thus it could be deduced that more than 80% of employees considered current challenges to be an important reason to think about succession. In relation to this, with respect to level of prioritization that these processes should have in the entity, it reached the following results: 29.8% of the respondents revealed that they strongly agreed and 56.7% agreed. 9% were indifferent and 4.5% said that they disagreed. Finally, there were no employees strongly disagreeing with this statement. These data showed us that the cooperative has had a good level of ability to carry out succession processes based on advances in knowledge management and improvements within the organization.

### **PROPOSAL**

Know-how has become an implicit business strategy in the Jardín Azuayo savings and credit cooperative, its purpose and dynamics built with participatory and constructivist methodologies have forged the foundations to empower the entity and its collaborators towards growth and sustainability. For this reason, the proposal aims to improve the knowledge management processes in the institution.

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## **Process**

The activities such as planning execution and evaluation promote knowledge in the personnel. This tacit knowledge must be made visible for the team and for the institution, because it is important that, in addition to the processes of project execution and service provision, the entity gives rise to an institutional process of standardized systematization of experiences that convert each project, activity or plan into a producer of tangible inputs of knowledge. In this way, the habit of recording information and data allows building a reliable learning that would be available to other teams. Therefore, it is recommended storing this file or matrix digitally on the company intranet, so that it may be available to all staff as a source of consultation, becoming a library of experiences.

This compilation must adhere to the processes that generate proposals such as work meetings at all levels and areas, focusing, mainly, on those related to strategic, administrative and government processes, for example, in the procedure "Manage institutional administration".

## **Intellectual capital**

According to this research, it can be determined that Jardín Azuayo maintains an excellent level of intellectual capital, there are opportunities for professional development, exchange of ideas and strong organizational empowerment; however, this is not clearly identified by all collaborators, which triggers ignorance of tools and spaces that generate collective knowledge. Knowledge-generating actions are present in the daily life of the institution, many of them dispersed in different places and times, but they account for their existence. Recognizing this reality, the main activities are directed by the cooperative education department (educope), which is closely related to know-how, alignment and institutional empowerment. In coherence with this reality, it is recommended that this area lead the management of knowledge to overcome existing weaknesses. In this way, the following is proposed:

1. Count on the cooperative education department (educope) to manage institutional recognition.

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2. Socialize the subject by means of virtual training through the educope platform to generate understanding about the concept of knowledge management.
3. Determine a participatory management group composed of actors from the strategic, operational, service, support, planning and government areas, so that information transfer and support flows can be determined through an institutional diagnosis.
4. Define the roles of the management team and key people in each of the areas, trying to make them the link between what to do daily and the conceptualization of that knowledge, which becomes inputs that feed the institutional strategy.
5. Strengthen the internal intranet.

The actions proposed will allow the entity to further enhance human capital by motivating its employees to be generators of knowledge, which has a direct impact on the work environment by valuing people's experience. These actions will also cause an improvement in the structural capital.

## **Succession**

The organizational evolution and the level of empowerment of administrators, managers and collaborators of Jardín Azuayo, favor the implementation of structural changes. This characteristic has been fundamental for financial growth and institutional recognition at the national and international level. As it often happens in this stage of companies, the entity only needs the political decision to take the next step. Furthermore, with more than two decades of experience, changes in senior leadership positions have occurred only once in the cooperative and it is not clear how to execute a succession process in these positions until now; however, the subject is widely mentioned and this institution prepares itself; therefore, as it is proposed an institutional strategy in the field of human talent in the 2019-2023 strategic plan, a flow of the succession process is recommended with the following aspects proposed to work on the cooperative:

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**1. Conformation of a multidisciplinary team.** - Six people would make up this work team. They must initially define a work plan that includes all aspects related to the subject.

**2. Define structure and procedures.** - This committee will propose the general guidelines and will manage the approval in the respective instances. The most important task is a management model to clarify the practical procedure, that is, at what levels, cases and times it would be applied.

**3. Selection.** - The proposed committee must establish when, who and under what terms or conditions people may apply.

**4. Action plan.** - Once the people have been selected, the cooperative must propose the lines of academic training and development of competencies of the collaborators with emphasis on monitoring their performance to guarantee favorable results for the entity.

**5. Application.-** For the transcendence of the succession when the need for application arises, the organization must have an application plan so that these changes do not delay institutional management. With proper administration, the institution will have a base of collaborators ready to assume command positions at any time.

## **Innovation**

At present, the financial sector points towards the virtualization of services in order to offer their users access to all types of procedures and transactions through internet, as well as relationships and closeness with partners and customers to strengthen loyalty. For this to happen, there are internal key elements that make these advantages possible in the market and one of them is innovation, which focuses on strengthening the abilities and skills of the entire team, seeking to renew leadership in a timely manner.

The most obvious way to measure the effects of innovation are in productivity and financial sustainability indicators; this is because, by raising the capacities of the staff as a whole, the processes become more efficient and effective.

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Based on the aforementioned, it is important to highlight that when an entity maintains excellent financial indicators quantitatively and watches over the skills of employees based on knowledge management and leadership specialization at all levels, it will be successful.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Knowledge management enhances the capacity of their personnel in companies, facilitates structural changes, generates rapid adaptation to change, improves their internal processes and constant innovation and gives them a competitive advantage to win new markets for increasing their positioning and maintaining profitability and sustainability.

The Jardín Azuayo cooperative has a good level of knowledge management that may raise its level with the proposed approaches; it also has excellent intellectual capital based on the institutional trajectory, the empowerment of its philosophy, the tangible application of its values and principles, its participatory structure and its constructivist methodologies.

The entity has a high-level human capital with developed capacities to assume new responsibilities. The existing internal instances allow the movement of people in different directions, which represent opportunities for professional development to implement innovative management proposals.

A succession process is well seen by most of the cooperative's collaborators, since the entity counts on the administrative, social and financial conditions for a successful application.

The nature of the institution, its organic structure and social characteristics favor innovation processes and allow measuring its impact in a quantitative way. Besides, it has indicators that reflect its work environment, member satisfaction, quality of services, solvency and profitability, which position it as one of the most important entities in the country.

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