

Cooperative resilience: A diversity of practices

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-\$31,000,000,000

Loans outstanding among US Banks from 2007 to 2008 (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009).

\$36,000,000,000

Loans outstanding among US Credit Unions from 2007 to 2008 (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009)

(1) What are the practices that French-speaking Belgian cooperatives prioritize to achieve **resilience**?

(2) How is a **capability-based conceptualization of organizational resilience** conceived in the case of French-speaking Belgian cooperatives?

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What is “organizational resilience”?



An outcome or a process?

(Duchek, 2020; Johnson et al., 2013; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Meyer, 1982; Van Breda, 2018; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007)



A group of easily distinguishable capabilities?

(Duchek, 2020; Hernes et al., 2025; Martin & Sunley, 2015)

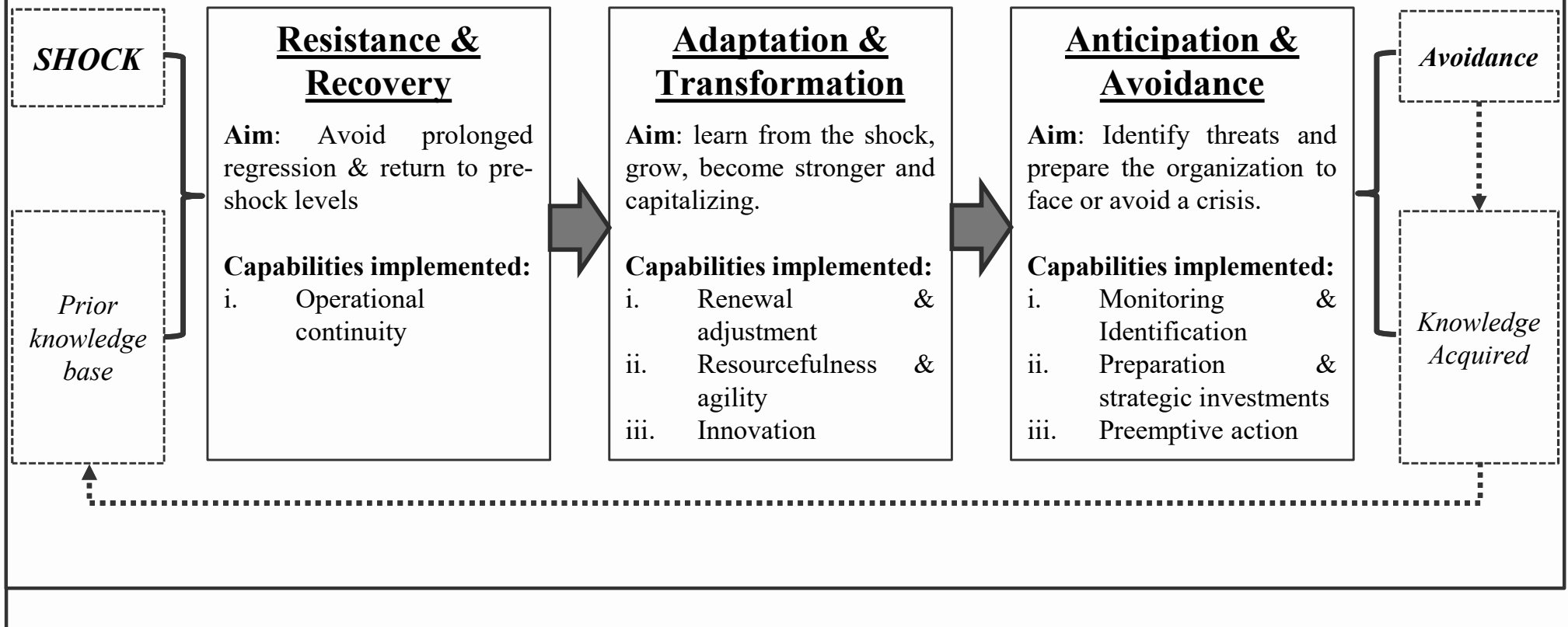


An increasingly meaningless concept?

(Korber & McNaughton, 2018; Michels & Schmidt, 2025; Raetz et al., 2022; Wildavsky, 1988)

Resilience as a Capability

Framework based on Duchek (2020)



What is a Cooperative?

"A co-operative is 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." (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015)



1. Open and Voluntary Membership



2. Democratic Member Control



3. Member Economic Participation



4. Autonomy and Independence



5. Education, Training and Information



6. Cooperation among Cooperatives



7. Concern for Community

Methodology



Interviews to 20 French-speaking Belgian Cooperatives

Divided into 4 groups: Consumer (7), Producer (3), Worker (4) and Multistakeholder (5)



External and internal crises

External: COVID-19 pandemic, 2021-2023 energy crisis, 2021-2023 inflation spike and climate crisis

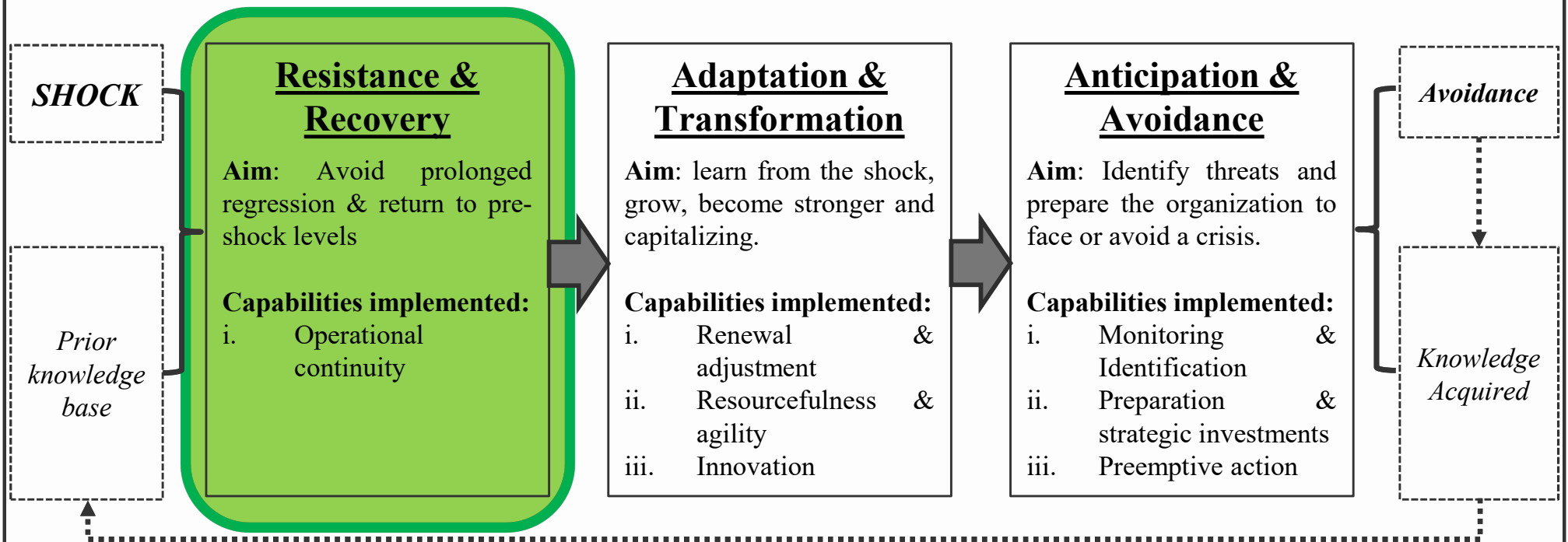


Grounded theory

Open coding, axial coding and theoretical coding (integration).

Results: Resistance & Recovery

Framework based on Duchek (2020)



Results: Resistance & Recovery

- **Involvement of members**

- “There were 56 people that voluntarily came to work and make the necessary rearrangements during the 10 days of closure.” Joséphine_CC03

- **Political commitment**

- “We have people we like. We want this to continue. (...) A cooperative is also an entrepreneurial procedure. So... We launch a project. We believe in it politically.” Fabien_WC02.

- **Collaboration**

- A cooperative “whose premises burned down (...) They didn’t have anything left and they received funds and [material] that arrived from other cooperatives”. Baptiste_MC01

- **Loyalty**

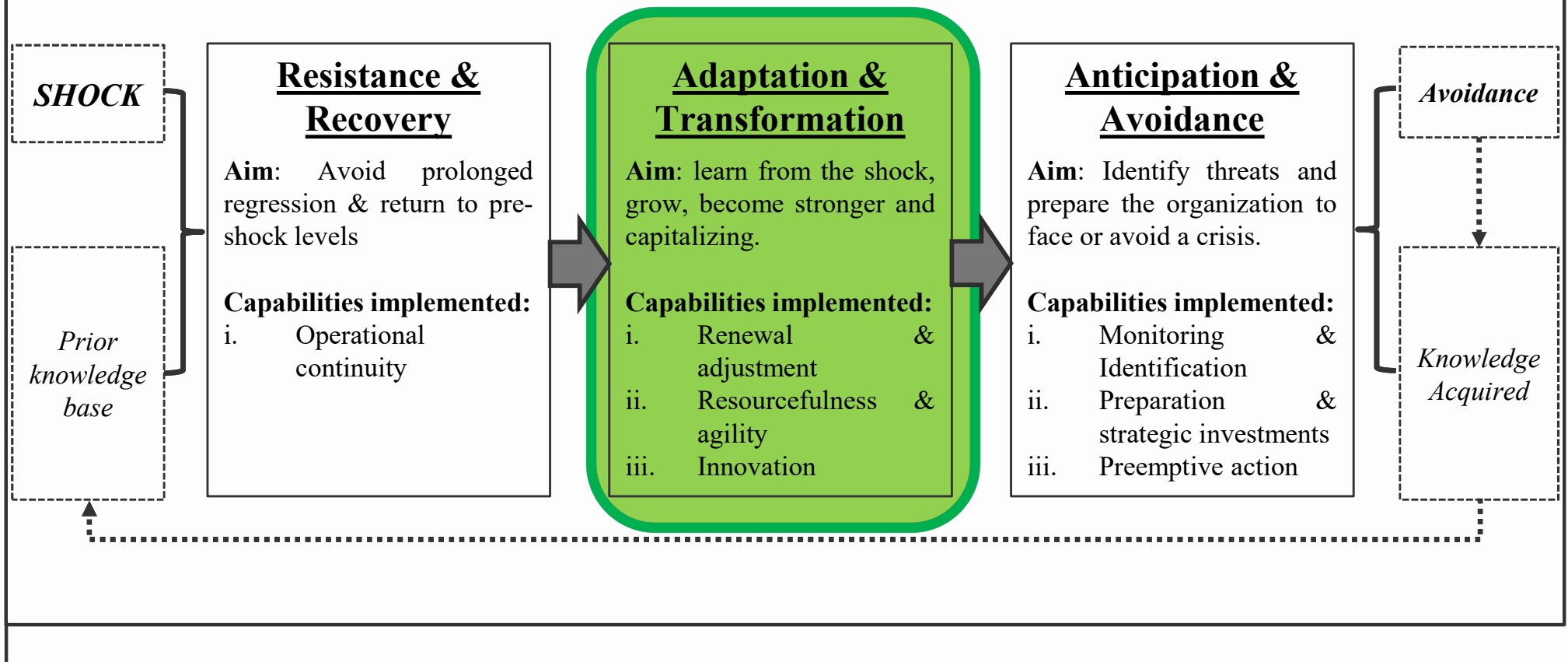
- After a power outage on New Years, “the factory is at a standstill (...) 35 employees voluntarily come to clean all the showers and towers, les tours, to restart as soon as possible” Olivier_PC01

- **Proximity**

- “In terms of consumption, many people moved back to small producers. We are part of these small producers. So, during COVID, we grew.” David_CC01

Results: Adaptation & Transformation

Framework based on Duchek (2020)



Results: Adaptation & Transformation

- **Proximity & Trust**

- Patricia_MC05 asserted that they were compelled to adapt “to be flexible and to be able to respond to a demande that exploded overnight.”
- “When a person speaks out, they are already half relieved.” Olivier_PC01

- **Solidarity**

- Gilles_CC02, claims that, during the pandemic, his cooperative allowed clients – many of which were members of the cooperative – to defer credit payments until they regained economic stability.

- **Creativity**

- “We came up with a few operational rules to help the members in need.” Olivier_PC01

- **Agility & Flexibility**

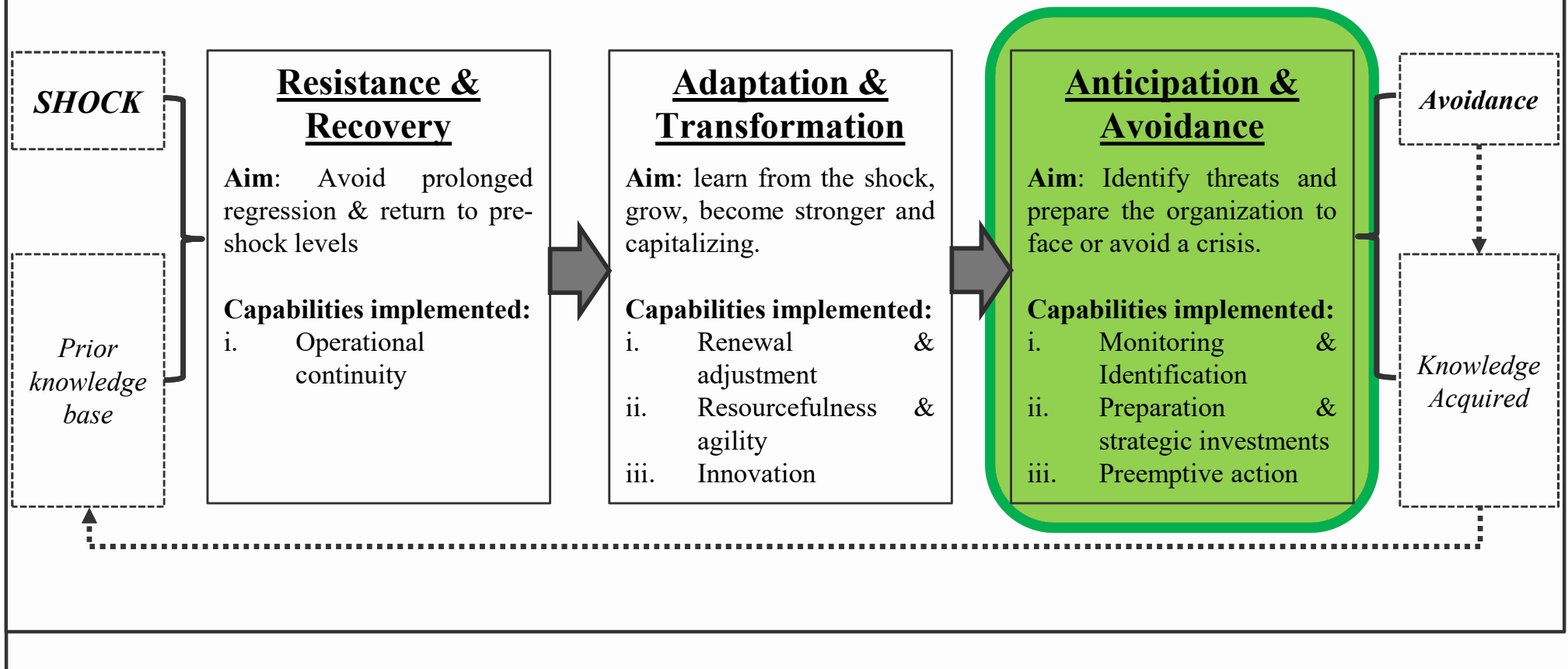
- “If a big crisis arrives and the General Assembly decides to reorient [the cooperative] towards other kinds of activities, this is a freedom we have.” Baptiste_MC01

- **Collaboration**

- “We proposed [two cooperatives] to buy a share, which would allow these cooperatives to have a revenue even if they did not have their own wind turbine.” Lucien_CC05

Results: Anticipation & Avoidance

Framework based on Duchek (2020)



Results: Anticipation & Avoidance (1)

- **Collaboration & Replicability**

- “We’ve become close to [Coop X]. We share premises. (...) We share competencies. (...) We have created a common tool. We have common stock and personnel sharing some missions.” Marc_MC04

- **Collaboration & Political Commitment**

- “It’s an exchange of good practices and information. It is also a political process. (...) We have had several mechanisms that have been implemented thanks to political lobbying” Christine_MC02

- **Proximity & Solidarity**

- Christine_MC02 and David_CC01 use their general assemblies to foster connections among cooperators, and Josephine_CC03 reports that her cooperative organizes visits to the producers supplying their store.
- “the municipality is also interested, likes the project and says: ‘we want them to stay here” Patricia_MC05
- Institutions invest in them “because they believe in the good thing we do for society” Igor_MC03

- **Solidarity (towards members)**

- Sarah_WC04 explains that the mission of her cooperative is to “give [people] work so they can advance in their personal projects, but also to provide them a fulfilling framework, in their profession, but also in their personal lives.”

Results: Anticipation & Avoidance (2)

- **Loyalty**

- Fabien_WC02 claims that “every departure is anticipated several months in advance. Thus, there is a guaranteed transition.”
- “Today, (...) with inflation, a person investing 100€ ten years ago, they are not worth the same thing. So let’s try to take inflation into consideration a bit”. However, this was “refused by the General Assembly: (...) ‘if we do this we might strain the financial accounts’.” Albert_WC01

- **Solidarity (towards society)**

- Gilles_CC02, claims that, during the pandemic, his cooperative allowed clients – many of which were members of the cooperative – to defer credit payments until they regained economic stability.

- **Instruction**

- “The cooperators are people that are also a bit like ambassadors of the project. (...) If there are discourses outdoors or with the press.” Sarah_WC04

Results: Anticipation & Avoidance (3)

- **Agility**

- "We have this capacity to amange ourselves, collectively at the cooperative, without having to be accountable to X or Y". Baptiste_MC01

- **Prudence**

- "There is no capital to reimburse, investors to repay. So, we do not have the need to take risks to grow substantially." Fabien_WC02

- **Involvement of Members**

- "Beyond shared governance, we have tried to take care of the collective and the interaction with the people. (...) This has allowed us to see in advance who was feeling well, or not; who wanted to change their roles, who was at risk of quitting and how we should prépare for that." Fabien_WC02

- **Trust**

- Even when powerful members are also cooperators, "it's always one person - one voice, so even if we get more shares it is always one person - one voice." Marc_MC04

Discussion: 3-dimensional grid

Cooperative Principles	Resistance & Recovery	Adaptation & Transformation	Anticipation & Avoidance
1. Voluntary and Open Membership	Involvement		
2. Democratic Member Control		Trust, Creativity & Agility	Loyalty & Involvement
3. Member Economic Participation			Involvement & Financial Savings
4. Autonomy and Independence		Agility	Agility
5. Education, Training and Information			Instruction
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives	Collaboration		Collaboration, Replicability & Scaling
7. Concern for Community	Solidarity, Loyalty & Proximity	Proximity, Solidarity & Agility	Political Commitment, Trust, Transparency, Solidarity, Prudence & Proximity

Discussion: Not all cooperatives are equal

- (Observed) negative relationship between **size** & respect of “cooperative” fundamentals (principles)
 - How does this affect their resilience?
- (Observed) negative relationship between **age** & respect of “cooperative” fundamentals (principles)
 - How does this affect their resilience?
- Differences in adherence to Cooperative Principles depending on **cooperative type**
 - **Innovation-based** cooperatives VS **Necessity-based** cooperatives
 - Is one kind more resilient than the other?

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