TrainingConcepts

CASE STUDY · STRATEGIC RETREAT DESIGN AND FACILITATION

Strategy for the *co-operative movement*

Facilitated strategic retreats for Singapore's credit and service co-operatives — boards and management working through risk, governance, growth and the plan for the year ahead. Running since 2008, and still running.

2008	5	17	Ongoing
first retreat	co-operatives	years of retreats	annual cycle

CO-OPERATIVES SERVED

Singapore Government Staff Credit Co-operative · Singapore Customs Credit Co-operative · TCC Credit Co-operative · SASCO · Secure Guard Services Co-operative



01 The brief

A credit co-operative is the custodian of its members' savings. It owes them security of deposit, a fair return, and the governance that makes both possible — and it is run by a board of volunteers alongside a small management team.

That is a demanding combination, and it has become more demanding. Minimum qualification requirements for officers, changes to the Co-operative Societies Act, rising compliance expectations and audit scrutiny sit alongside the business itself: loan portfolios under pressure, defaults to recover, membership to grow and a digital shift to fund.

Since 2008 Training Concepts' lead trainer has designed and facilitated annual strategic retreats for a group of credit and service co-operatives, working with partner organisation Service Quality Centre. Each retreat is built for the society in front of us — its numbers, its regulator's findings, its board.

The co-operative society, as custodian of members' assets, has a duty of care: to secure their deposits, to provide an adequate return through innovative services, and to practise good governance.

THE PREMISE EVERY RETREAT STARTS FROM

WHAT BOARDS ARE UP AGAINST

- Minimum qualification requirements for directors and key officers
- Changes to the Co-operative Societies Act and rising compliance demands
- Declining loan portfolios, rising defaults and thin margins
- Slow membership growth and an ageing member profile
- Key positions vacant, with succession unplanned
- Digital and data expectations a volunteer board has to fund and oversee



02 How the retreats work

A working session, not a conference. The agenda moves from performance review, through risk and governance, to the strategies and action plans for the year ahead.

Designed around the society

Every retreat is built from the co-operative's own performance data, regulatory position and board composition — never from a template.

Board and management together

Directors, the general manager and working committee chairmen in one room, so plans are made by the people who must carry them.

Last year before next year

The retreat opens with a review of the previous year's plan, reported by the committee chairmen who owned each part of it.

Facilitated, not presented

Ground rules agreed at the start, then structured activities, scenario work and open challenge. The facilitator keeps time and keeps it honest.

Expert sessions built in

Legal counsel on statutory and regulatory compliance; investment and risk assessment; auditors' findings taken seriously in the room.

A plan with owners and dates

The retreat closes with strategies, action plans and the measures that will show whether they worked.

AT A GLANCE

FORMAT	One- to two-day facilitated strategic retreat
AUDIENCE	Board of directors, general manager, committee chairmen and key staff
CYCLE	Annual, with the previous year's plan reviewed first
PARTNER	Service Quality Centre
SINCE	2008, and ongoing

A TYPICAL RETREAT AGENDA

Opening

Welcome from the chairman or general manager, then ground rules agreed by the room.

Performance review

Last year's results, strengths and weaknesses, and reports from each working committee chairman.

Risk and crisis

The risk management framework applied to this society's exposures.

Governance and compliance

Corporate governance, statutory obligations and audit findings, with legal counsel.

Looking ahead

Strategies, action plans and targets for the coming year.

Joint session

Where two societies collaborate, a shared session and a programme for the year.

03 The planning discipline

Strategic planning forces a board to choose: what the society will do, and what it will not. The retreats use a five-stage model, worked through in sequence.

FOUR QUESTIONS THE BOARD MUST ANSWER

- Where are we now?
- Where do we need to be?
- How will we close the gap?
- How will we monitor our progress?

A plan that survives the year has particular qualities, and the retreat tests the draft against them before anyone leaves.

A GOOD STRATEGIC PLAN

- Addresses the critical performance issues, not the comfortable ones
- Balances what the society is capable of against what it would like to do
- Covers a long enough period to actually close the performance gap
- Conveys a desired future state people can picture
- Stays flexible enough to accommodate change
- Guides decisions further down — operational, tactical and individual

THE A-B-C-D-E MODEL

A

Assessment

Where we are: environmental scan, background information, situational analysis and a SWOT.

B

Baseline

The situation past, present and future; significant issues; fit with capabilities; and the gaps.

C

Components

Where we want to be: mission and vision, values and guiding principles, major goals and specific objectives.

D

Down to specifics

How we will do it: performance measures, targets and standards, initiatives, projects and action plans.

E

Evaluate

How we are doing: performance management, progress against a balanced scorecard, corrective action and revised plans.



04 Risk, crisis and resilience

A crisis is any situation with the potential to affect long-term confidence in the society, or to stop it operating normally. For a credit co-operative that can mean unexpected large withdrawals, a wave of loan defaults, a fraud, or a data breach.

THE RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS, APPLIED TO THE SOCIETY

- Establish the context — policies, systems, relationships, and the criteria against which risk will be judged
- Identify the risks, with the stakeholders who are affected by each
- Analyse and evaluate: likelihood, impact, and what the society will simply not tolerate
- Treat the risk — reduce, transfer, accept or avoid, with an owner for each decision
- Monitor and review, and communicate throughout; consultation is not optional

Strategic Declining loans, member retention, competitive pressure, integration problems, regulation	**Operational** Cost overruns, weak operating controls, poor resource management, employee issues including fraud, bribery and corruption
Hazard Macroeconomic shocks, political and legal issues, a computer breach	**Financial** Debt and interest rates, poor financial management, asset quality, accounting problems, goodwill and amortisation

ALSO WORKED THROUGH

- Fraud prevention and the controls that actually catch it
- Critical cyber threats to the society's systems, and threat intelligence
- Personal data protection obligations and practical measures
- A crisis communications plan, agreed before it is needed
- Investment options and the risk assessment behind each



05 What the retreats cover

The agenda differs by society and by year, but the working areas recur. A full cycle for one co-operative ran to eleven of them in a single plan.

Governance

What constitutes good governance for a co-operative: the board's duties, committee structure, conflicts, and compliance with the Act and the regulator's expectations.

Board capability

Inducting directors with the expertise the society needs, meeting minimum qualification requirements, and planning for succession at board and management level.

Performance

Key result areas, and KPIs the board can actually track — reviewed through a balanced scorecard rather than an annual surprise.

Automation and data

Where operations and processes can be automated, and how data can be used to track business performance and sharpen management reporting.

Membership and marketing

Membership outreach, benefits that build loyalty, campaigns that reach beyond the existing base, and the credit co-operative alternative told clearly.

Loans and recovery

Loan targets by type, conversion of leads, and recovery strategies for managing defaults.

Strategic partnerships

Working with credit counselling agencies, self-help groups and sister co-operatives on shared problems.

Event and HR planning

The year's calendar of member events, and the training and development the staff team needs to deliver it.







06 Seventeen years, and still going

What began in 2008 as a single retreat has become an annual discipline across several societies. The value is in the repetition: each year opens by reporting on the plan made the year before, which is the only real test of whether a strategic retreat worked.

Over that time the agenda has moved with the sector. Early retreats were dominated by risk and crisis management in the wake of the financial crisis, and by statutory compliance. Later ones added cyber threat and data protection, automation and data analytics, digital marketing and membership retention, and long-horizon plans such as one society's Vision 2020 workplan.

2008 onwards

Risk management, crisis planning, governance and statutory compliance.

The middle years

Performance measurement, KPIs on key result areas, and membership growth.

More recently

Cyber risk, data protection, automation, data analytics and digital marketing.

WHY IT KEEPS WORKING

A board that reports on last year's plan before it writes the next one gets better at both.

The retreats give volunteer directors a structure they can use, a facilitator who will ask the uncomfortable question, and a written plan with names against it.



07 Your facilitator

Shareef Jaffar

International management and training consultant · co-operative director

Shareef designs and facilitates these retreats. He is not a visitor to the sector: he chairs the board of Singapore's largest credit co-operative, serves as 2nd Deputy Chairman of the National Cooperative Federation, and chairs two service co-operatives. He knows what a volunteer board can realistically carry out.

He holds a master's degree in law in corporate governance, an MSc in strategic planning and an MA in education, and is an Accredited Senior Director of the Singapore Institute of Directors.

IN THE MOVEMENT

- Chairman, TCC Credit Cooperative Society — Singapore's largest credit co-operative
- 2nd Deputy Chairman, National Cooperative Federation, Singapore
- Chairman, Secure Guards Cooperative and Security Masters Ltd
- Facilitator of annual strategic retreats for credit and service co-operatives since 2008

GOVERNANCE CREDENTIALS

- Accredited Senior Director, Singapore Institute of Directors
- Chartered Secretary and Chartered Governance Professional (FCG)
- Master's in Law, Corporate Governance, The University of Law, UK
- Listed Entity Directors Programme — all modules completed

ALSO AVAILABLE

Strategic Visioning · Crisis Prevention & Management · Setting Key Performance Indicators · Developing Effective Collaborative Partnerships · Problem Solving Tools. Any programme can be contextualised for your society in the same way.

PLAN YOUR NEXT RETREAT

Bring your board and your management team to the same table.

Tell us where your society stands and what the year ahead demands. We will design the retreat around your numbers, your regulator and your board — and leave you with a plan that has owners and dates.

TrainingConcepts

Singapore · Serving clients across Asia Pacific

+65 8993 1155

enquiries@trainingconcepts.us

www.trainingconcepts.us