

# WHO IS THE CAPTAIN?

## A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY TO LEADERSHIP IN SMALL SUSTAINABLE FISHERS' COOPERATIVES IN THE NORTH OF THE NETHERLANDS.



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## **WHO IS THE CAPTAIN?**

# **A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY TO LEADERSHIP IN SMALL SUSTAINABLE COOPERATIVES IN THE NORTH OF THE NETHERLANDS**

Collaboration and leadership can contribute to the transition towards sustainability. Business forms based on collaboration are cooperatives and the number of active cooperatives increased. A cooperative is characterized by board members and cooperative members. When a cooperative is small these two groups form one. This research aims to understand the role of leadership in small sustainable cooperatives. Therefore, it is investigated how leadership in cooperatives contributes to the transition towards sustainable business models by means of three leadership tasks. This study took a qualitative single case study approach. Six interviews were conducted with stakeholders of a small sustainable cooperative in the north of the Netherlands active in the agriculture sector. It became clear that leadership tasks are shared. However, one person is seen as the leader. The leader practices tasks that no other member wants or can fulfill, and this makes him indispensable. This research contributes academically because the information from current leadership research also applies to cooperatives, and it shows that size influences the decision-making processes. The limitation of this research is the single and specific form of organization that is investigated. Further research can research how culture, region, personal characteristics, and gender influence leadership in a small group.

## INTRODUCTION

Fishing, a form of prehistorical hunting and gathering we still practice in modern times. How do these fisheries still hold up in a world of change?

Leadership is a major element that influences the performances of organizations (Hussain & Hassan, 2016), and managers can be important for the transition of business toward circularity (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2021). Besides sustainable managers, collaborations are required to achieve sustainability (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2021). Both leadership and collaboration can contribute to a sustainable business model. Sustainability is a complex issue and refers to “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” (Brundtland, 1987) The collaborations, which are needed for achieving sustainability (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2021), makes it even more complex because of the different perspectives of stakeholders. Sustainability and collaboration are two complex subjects. In which way an organization operates sustainably and collaboratively depends on the role of leadership. Therefore, it is important to understand the role of leadership in collaboratively designed businesses. In short, it can be stated that the combination of leadership and collaboration contributes to the transition towards sustainability. However, there is a lack of knowledge about leadership in collaborative business designs.

Business designs that are based on collaboration are cooperatives (Doesum, 2009). According to articles 2:53 and 2:53a from the Dutch Civil Code, a cooperative can only be formed by a multilateral legal act, which means that the foundation must be done by several people. This is the same with the legal form “association”, but an association has no profit motive (art. 2:26, Dutch Civil Code). The combination of multiple members/collaboration and profit motive makes a cooperative a business form. Members of a cooperative combine their business activities to gain financial benefits (Gepken-Jager, 2022), which they are not able to gain separately. Members of a cooperative strive for a common goal that they cannot achieve

on their own (Doesum, 2009), continuously they combine their business activities. In a cooperative where different enterprises collaborate, they combine business activities and at the same time have their own business. In that case, the enterprise could be a member of the cooperative. The number of active cooperatives is increasing (CBS, sd), but little is known about the role of leadership in this specific legal form: small sustainable cooperatives where cooperative members are also board members.

The number of cooperatives in the Netherlands increased steadily since 2007 (CBS, sd), on average every Dutch citizen is a member of at least one cooperative (NCR, sd), and most of the cooperatives are active in the agricultural- and food sector (Kasanngali, 2021). Therefore, this research focuses on an entrepreneurial cooperative active in the agricultural- and food sector, namely a cooperative in the fishing industry. Independent fisheries form a small sustainable fishers' cooperative where cooperative members are board members too and they operate in the north of The Netherlands. The name of the cooperative will remain unknown due to privacy concerns. Therefore, in this research, it is referred to as "Cooperative".

Currently, sustainable fishing gets a lot of attention in the European Union and the Dutch government. Therefore, laws are made to prevent over-fishing, by-catch, and soil damage (Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 2021). Investing in selective fishing is very expensive for the fishers and consumers do not want to pay for sustainable fish. Therefore, sustainable fishing falls short in the Netherlands. The Dutch cooperative researched in this study responds to these limits by collaborating. Members of this cooperative have joined forces by sharing licenses that are needed to fish on specific species. Therefore, they can fish on more species, share costs, and have more control over the fishing population in this area which results in preventing overfishing. The fisher's catch is not shared with other members, this is for the fisherman himself. Besides members, a cooperative has a board. The subjects on which the board itself decides and the subjects on which the board needs the members' control are

specified in the articles of association. In small cooperatives, it is possible that the members of the cooperative form the board itself. This is the case of the cooperative used in this research. What does this mean for a cooperative where the cooperative members are board members too? Does this mean that they are their own leader, or each other leaders, or is the board itself seen as the leader? Investigating the role of leadership in cooperatives results in understanding who the leader is and how this form of leadership contributes to the transition to sustainability.

In short, the number of active cooperatives is increasing, but little is known about the role of leadership in this specific legal form: small cooperatives where cooperative members are also board members. It is even more important to research this because research has shown that leadership and collaborations can have a positive influence on the transition to sustainability, in this case, sustainable fishing business models. Therefore, the research aims to understand the role of leadership in sustainable cooperatives. Through a single case study will be made clear how leadership is shaped in small cooperatives. The following question will be answered: ‘‘How can leadership contribute to the transition towards sustainable business models in small fisher’s cooperatives operating in the north of the Netherlands?’’

This article is organized as follows. Firstly, the study reviews and link the literature with three domains: characteristics of cooperatives, sustainable leadership tasks, and extended information about decision-making processes. Next, the methodology is described, a qualitative single case study of leadership in a small sustainable cooperative performing in the north of the Netherlands. After that the results are shown, followed by the final chapter of discussion, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Sustainable Fishing**

According to the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (2021) and Fishing law (1963), fishers fish sustainably when they stick to the quota, do not harm the fish population, seabed, nature, or ecosystem, and reduce the emission of harmful substances and CO<sub>2</sub>. Since 1987, Europe strives to select fishing to preserve the fish stock. That is why rules have been imposed on the mesh size of the trawl nets and their usage to prevent by-catch and seabed damage, and every fisher needs to possess a quota to prevent overfishing. Whereas rules are introduced to avoid overfishing, by-catch, and soil damage, there are ‘‘only’’ subsidies for reducing the emission of harmful substances and CO<sub>2</sub>. This means that fishers are encouraged to reduce their emissions, instead of forced to. However, the emissions of fisher boats are enormous. In short, according to Dutch law, sustainable fishing is selective fishing whereas CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are excluded.

### **Cooperatives & Non-Cooperatives**

According to articles 2:53 and 2:53a from the Dutch Civil Code, we can speak of a cooperative if the organization 1) is established by a notarial deed, 2) has members, 3) provides for physical needs of members, 4) is conducted for the benefits of the members, and 5) may distribute profits to its members. The members of a cooperative combine their business activities to gain financial benefits (Gepken-Jager, 2022) and share a common goal, that they are not able to reach separately (Doesum, 2009).

The key characteristics of cooperatives are democratic control, equity, equal voting rights, profit-sharing, social responsiveness, job security, and social inclusion (Martinez-Leon, Olmedo-Cifuentes, Martínez-Victoria, & Arcas-Lario, 2020). Similarities in performances of cooperatives and non-cooperative business models in the agricultural sector are profitability,

capital gearing, and liquidity, as well as business operational efficiency indicators such as sales/working capital ratios and creditor ratios (Hind, 1994).

Besides similar performances of the business forms, a difference can be found in the approach to managing. Cooperatives are ‘‘required to balance members' needs with the attainment of corporate goals’’ (Hind, 1994). This connects to the two main challenges that concern cooperatives, that do not affect non-cooperative, according to Geeroms (2019). The first challenge is to keep the collective approach in mind and act like it. In process of time, cooperatives tend to behave like non-cooperatives. The second challenge is controlling cooperative regard to decision-making. The bigger the cooperative, the more challenging and time-consuming to make decisions collectively. These challenges are related to managing the balance between staying close to the core of the cooperative and at the same time being financially stable to keep/gain a marketplace. Non-cooperatives are mostly focused on the latter aspect. The second difference and most practical one is thus the voting rights of the members of the cooperatives which influence the decision-making process. The decision-making processes of cooperatives involve more democratic control than most other forms of businesses (Henehan & Anderson, 1994).

### **Cooperatives & Sustainability**

Cooperatives are more focused on environmental and social issues in comparison with large companies, for example, cooperatives have less extreme income disparities than larger organizations (Parker, 2017). Additionally, using the cooperatives characteristics makes it easier to make a change to a more responsible business model (Martinez-Leon, et al., 2020). These characteristics are democratic control, equity, equal voting rights, profit-sharing, social responsiveness, job security, and social inclusion (Martinez-Leon, et al., 2020). Furthermore, people-centered business models, like cooperatives, accelerate Sustainable Development Goals

(SDG) implementation (Martinez-Leon, et al., 2020). Forgacs (2008) confirms the social aspects of a cooperative by explaining that “cooperatives are not only economic units, but also social networks”.

## **Leadership**

There are several forms of leadership and leadership definitions (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). Leadership, in general, can be seen as “a process of influence” (Metcalf & Benn, 2012), where people, not only managers, can influence each other. The definition Gemmil and Oakley (1992) give to leadership is “a social process ... of dynamic collaboration, where individuals and organization members authorize themselves and others to interact in ways that experiment with new forms of intellectual and social meaning.” This connects to two of the five criteria of Gandolfi (2016) that stated that 1) leadership must be one or more leaders and 2) have followers. A form of leadership that focuses on followers, on the ability of individuals firstly, is servant leadership. In other words, servant leaders put the needs of the people they serve first. They help their followers to grow and succeed. The vision here is that maximizing individual potential leads to the potential of the organization itself. Another form of leadership that connects to the definition of Gemmil and Oakley (1992) is shared leadership. This is defined as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both.” (Pearce & Conger, 2003b) A cooperative can be seen as a group of individuals that have the same goals in mind and act collectively to achieve these. The difference between servant leadership and shared leadership is that servant leadership firstly focuses on “the other” and then on collectiveness, whereas shared leadership immediately focus on the common goal.



## **Leadership & Sustainability**

Leaders who find the balance between the financial goals and cooperative goals can gain great attraction from clients/customers, members and employees. In this way, cooperatives can be financially stable and play an important societal role in times of change (Geeroms, 2019). Based on the tasks of the leadership framework of Van Velsor and McCauley (2004), Quinn and Dalton (2009) examine these three tasks to clarify sustainable leadership: setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment. Firstly, setting direction are the actions and behaviors of leaders that they use to articulate the goals, vision, or objectives associated with introducing sustainability into the workplace. This task focuses on framing and delivering messages, implementing concepts of sustainability, and inspiring/motivating employees "to adopt sustainability as an organizational goal" (Quinn & Dalton, 2009). Secondly, creating alignment are the structures and processes created to support the vision and mission of sustainability. Aspects that belong to this task are stakeholder engagement and physical building/products/services. Thirdly, maintaining commitment is the process of how leaders keep employees and external stakeholders engaged, committed, and enthusiastic about the process of sustainability. The leader's 1) introduction and discussion of sustainable principles, 2) the redesign of an organization's distribution of resources, the decision making, and production processes, and 3) the effective and continued engagement of employees and external stakeholders contribute to the change toward sustainability (Quinn & Dalton, 2009).

## **Decision-making Process in Cooperatives**

Members of a cooperative participate actively in decision-making (Parker, 2017). Decision-making is defined as "making a choice among the alternatives available to us" (Fiala, 1997). The unique characteristics of a cooperative have a direct influence on how decisions arise and how the final decision is made, for example, the values and beliefs of members have an impact

on which problems are discussed and which decisions are made (Henehan & Anderson, 1994). Additionally, the decision-making processes can be influenced by the voices and/or votes of the members. Research has shown that members of large cooperatives doubt “if cooperative leaders are listening and how well their opinions affect decision making” (Henehan & Anderson, 1994). However, they choose voicing over voting, which means that sharing their opinions with cooperative management is more common than voting on cooperative decisions (Henehan & Anderson, 1994). Furthermore, cooperatives have to deal with group decision-making because the members of the cooperative are also the owner of this organization.

Fiala (1997) differentiates two aspects of group decision-making: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is focused on the concern of the person itself, and cooperativeness is focused on satisfying others. The cooperative process values each other’s interests and strives to search “for a solution that is responsive to the needs of all” (Fiala, 1997). Research has shown that this approach only works when both parties/all members apply this theory. When one person processes it differently, the others will wait for this person to switch back to cooperativeness (Fiala, 1997).

There are three ways in which decisions can be made that deserve more clarification: democracy, consensus, and consent. Firstly, democratically voting is majority voting which means that “the majority makes the decisions for everyone.” (Butler & Rothstein, 1987) Secondly, voting with consensus “is a process of building cohesiveness and incentives for member support” (Reynolds, 1997), so that in the end “everyone makes the decisions for everyone” (Butler & Rothstein, 1987). This means that not everyone must be in complete agreement, and it is acceptable for all members that someone disagrees but still give consent to the proposal. In other words, members can agree to disagree and still allow the decision of the group. In the first two forms of decision-making, democratically and consensus, the influence of an individual is limited. This is an important difference from the third decision-making form:

consent. Thirdly, consent decision-making is a decision-making process whereby one individual can influence the decision that will be made by objection (Eckstein, 2016). For example, if a member disagrees, the group is not trying to convince this member “but seeks for a solution jointly” (Eckstein, 2016). Hence, the members of a group that vote by consent are not going to agree to disagree, contrary to a group that votes by consensus. Reynolds (1997) concludes that cooperatives are consensus-based organizations.

The characteristics of cooperatives described by Martinez-Leon et al. (2020) can be combined with the three tasks of sustainable leadership described by Quinn and Dalton (2009). The first task is to set direction, and this needs social responsiveness, which is one of the key characteristics of cooperatives. The second sustainable leader’s task is to create alignment. Therefore, a leader needs democratic control, equity, equal voting rights, profit-sharing, and social inclusion. Especially, democratic control, equity, and equal voting rights are major aspects of decision-making processes. The third task is to maintain commitment which refers to the way members and external stakeholders are engaged, where characteristics such as social responsiveness and social inclusion are needed.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Based on the cooperatives’ characteristics, three sustainable leadership tasks, and the decision-making process as differences from non-cooperatives, the following aspects will be researched to answer the question “How can leadership contribute to the transition towards sustainable business models in small fisher’s cooperatives operating in the north of the Netherlands?”:

- How does leadership manifest itself in a sustainable cooperative?
- In what way are decisions made? And what are the consequences of the way decisions are made?

### **Qualitative Single Case Study Approach**

To answer how leadership contributes to the transition towards sustainable business models in cooperatives, this research took a qualitative single case study approach. The case study approach fits well because “the goal of a case study is to concentrate on the uniqueness of the case and to develop a deep understanding of its complexity” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019, p. 65). In this case, a particular organization was investigated, namely a small sustainable cooperative in the agricultural and food sector in the north of the Netherlands. The uniqueness and specialization of the case is the alternative business form (cooperatives) in combination with sustainability and leadership. Sustainability itself is complex, and leadership in cooperatives too because the structure of a cooperative differs from other business forms. In addition to the alternative business form cooperative, this research is also specified to small and northern cooperatives. A small cooperative may have the exception that the members of the cooperative are also members of the board. This could affect the decision-making processes. The decision-making processes differ from other forms of businesses because cooperatives involve more democratic control according to Henahan and Anderson (1994).

The cooperative that was investigated for this phenomenon is a Dutch cooperative active in the north of the Netherlands. The cooperative had to have a sustainable mission and vision, otherwise, this research could not investigate the contribution to the transition towards a sustainable business model. Cooperative is a sustainable cooperative in agriculture because the fishers fish only abundant fish to restore the sea population. Which fish can be caught depends on the season, flow, and the other fish in the sea. Additionally, they composed rules and regulations regarding fishing gear and boat dimensions to prevent undesired bycatch and soil damage. Lastly, they are trying to minimize fuel emissions by adapting the business plan to preserve the fish stock. If the fisher fishes in an area where species of fish flow abundantly, the

fisher does not have to travel as far with the boat for the same amount of fish spread over a wider area. In this way, the fishers operate sustainably within the (eco)system.

Furthermore, this cooperative was chosen because 1) it is an organization with the Dutch legal form ‘‘cooperative’’, 2) they strive for sustainability in and around the Waddensea through collaboration, and 3) the team consists of a maximum of ten people. It was necessary to work with an organization that operates and was registered in the Netherlands because this research focused on Dutch law. Finally, the number of members in the cooperative mattered because of limited time. To conduct a complete case study, every member and the full board have to participate in this research. Therefore, a smaller number of members was preferred. Cooperative consists of four cooperative members and the same four people are also the board members.

The contribution of leadership in cooperatives is discovered based on the three aspects of leadership. To identify the leader’s 1) manifesting of sustainable principles, 2) decision-making processes, and 3) certainty for engagement of stakeholders, interviews were conducted. A comprehensive approach was conducted because all members, a former member, and an external stakeholder were interviewed. Besides, meeting minutes were analyzed as additional evidence of the interview results.

## **Data collection and analysis**

### ***Interviews***

Face-to-face and digital semi-structured interviews were held between late April and late May with all the members and the board of Cooperative, plus an old (board) member of the cooperative. This is a total of five persons because all five cooperative members were/are board members too. The sixth interview was conducted with a stakeholder of Cooperative to improve the perception of stakeholder engagement. This interview was held after the interviews with the fishers. The language in which the interviews were conducted was Dutch because all

interviewees are Dutch. In this way, the interviewees felt more confident and could express themselves better. The interview questions were based on research of Quinn and Dalton (2009) that investigated the implementation of sustainability principles, using Van Velsor and McCauley's (2004) tasks of leadership. For a complete interview guide, see APPENDIX A. Each interview took approximately one hour, and the structure was as follows:

1. Introduction of research
2. Questions about leadership
3. Questions about introducing sustainable principles in cooperative

The question Quinn and Dalton (2009) asked in this category was "How did leaders introduce the concept of sustainability and how did they inspire, enlist or motivate employees to adopt sustainability as an organizational goal?" The difference between Quinn and Dalton's (2009) research and this research is that the cooperative is born out of sustainable principles instead of adding them to the business, as was the case in the organizations Quinn and Dalton (2009) researched.

4. Questions about the decision-making process

Quinn and Dalton (2009) answered the question "What types of policies, structures, or operations do leaders establish in order to institutionalize the goal of sustainability?" The choice has been made to focus on decision-making processes in this category because this is one of the main operational differences between cooperatives and non-cooperative (Henahan & Anderson, 1994). Additionally, the cooperative is built on sustainable principles, so it is not about what is established but how it is organized.

5. Questions about maintaining commitment

Quinn and Dalton (2009) answered the question "How does a leader keep employees engaged and committed to the process of sustainability as enthusiasm, novelty, turnover,

and changes in business conditions take their toll?’’ Whereas Quinn and Dalton (2009) focus on employees, this research added external stakeholders because collaborating is part of a cooperative (Doesum, 2009). Additionally, sharing knowledge with the external network is part of maintaining commitment (Quinn & Dalton, 2009).

## 6. Closure

Semi-structured interviews contribute to the research because in-depth information was collected instead of general information about leadership in sustainable cooperatives. Additionally, semi-structured interviews provided the ability to ask follow-up questions to collect more in-depth information about this specific topic. As mentioned before, this research investigated a specific topic, namely leadership in small sustainable fishers’ cooperatives in the north of the Netherlands. Lastly, during interviews, additional information about the cooperative itself was collected (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019), which contributes to the understanding of sustainable cooperatives.

With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded. A document with all rules and regulations regarding the participants can be found in the Code of Consent (APPENDIX B). Furthermore, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews and a room was reserved to conduct the interview. After the conduction of the interviews, it was transcribed and coded. For replaying and transcribing the interviews the programs ‘‘Otranscribe’’ and ‘‘Trint’’ were used. The results were coded using ‘‘Atlasti’’. The interviews and transcriptions were conducted in the Dutch language, but quotes were translated to English when used in this article. APPENDIX D shows quotes from six transcripts related to the main subjects which are based on the way leadership manifests itself in sustainable cooperatives and how the decision-making process of cooperatives is designed. Due to privacy concerns, the names of the interviewees remain unknown. However, the roles of the interviewees are important to value the results and make sense of the quotes. Therefore, only the roles are indicated. The reference

is as follows: M stands for Members, C for Chairman, F for Former member, and E for External stakeholder. The number indicates different people when more people fulfill the same role. This is only the case for the members, M.

### ***Meeting minutes***

Seven years of digital meeting minutes were analyzed. The meeting minutes are not transcripts of the meeting, but a summary of what is discussed and what actions have to be taken, and by who as a result of the conversations. The minutes did lend themselves to gathering information about how the decision-making process is organized because in most cases only the outcomes of the conversation are described. However, it is very clearly described what follow-up tasks result from the meetings and who is responsible for conducting them. The seven years of digital meeting minutes are not consultable for readers of this article due to privacy concerns. The Code of Consent with regards to using the minutes can be found in APPENDIX C.

### **Ethics**

This research is conducted following The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018).

## **RESULTS**

This research examines the way leadership manifests itself in small sustainable cooperatives by using the three sustainable leadership tasks of Van Velsor and McCauley (2004): setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment. Additionally, it examines the decision-making process in the cooperative using three forms of decision-making: democratically, consensus and consent. The following sections discuss the leadership tasks as shaped in Cooperative, primarily based on interviews and with additional information from meeting minutes.



## **Setting direction**

One main theme occurs in the first category, setting direction: sharing responsibility for sustainability principles.

### ***Sharing responsibility for sustainability principles***

All the members share responsibility for adhering to Cooperative's sustainable principles, even when the principles are called into question. The members gave the same description of how sustainable principles are introduced to entrants: when an entrant wants to join the cooperative, this person has first contact with the chair. He sets up a meeting and this person is welcomed to join a meeting. The members and entrant introduce themselves to each other, if necessary because in this small sustainable industry people often already know each other. After that, the working process will be described, and they will discuss how they can reinforce each other. In this way, all members meet the entrant, and during the introduction, they can decide if the entrant fits the sustainability principles of the cooperative. All members of Cooperative mentioned that to date it never happened that an entrant wanted to join Cooperative but did not match the sustainable principles. They clarify that fishers who do not value the same in the first place, not even going to seek contact with the cooperative.

Besides checking the sustainability principles during acquaintance, keeping each other on track of these principles is a shared responsibility, for example, if they are asked for a project that has financial benefits for the cooperative but is against the principles of integrated fishing. In this case, all members have the role to go back to the core and "keep defining what you mean by your version of sustainability". If, after refreshing the minds, a member still disagrees, he can choose to leave the cooperative because he does not match the principles any more. This happens once. After discussing the project and considering what sustainability means for Cooperative, the member could not agree with the other members and decided to leave the

cooperative because his definition of sustainability did not match that of the others. Defining what sustainability is for the cooperative and sharing this is an open conversation, or as one of the members said: “What one considers sustainable, the other does not, so, for example, one has a very different view of something than another. And yes, you can talk about that.”

### **Creating alignment**

One main theme occurs in the second category, creating alignment: consensus decision-making processes.

#### *Consensus decision-making processes*

Decisions are made by consensus; thus not one person makes the decisions in the cooperative, but “everyone makes the decision for everyone” (Butler & Rothstein, 1987). The members even stated that it would not be a well-organized cooperative if one person makes the decision. The leader’s role is to provide information and be transparent about it. The analyses of the meeting minutes show that the chair, also when he was not formally titled as chair, provides the group with information due to starting the discussion by making an announcement/giving an update. Besides, the following verbs are used in the minutes in combination with the chair’s name: “C1 warns”, “C1 informs”, and “C1 reports”.

Consensus decision-making processes create the possibility that one member disagrees with a decision, but he is not against the decision: “And maybe, someone is sometimes less in favor of it, but we are all unanimous then. And yes, of course, people are different, so someone can have doubts, but then again because you are so small that piece of trust comes up, “Well, he says that for a reason, then I trust that he has thought about is well enough.””. One member says openly that he also experiences doubts personally from time to time: “Personally I have this too sometimes and I think “Well, I do not think it will work out” but then I hope I am wrong.” Another member shows the critical self-reflection he takes when his view differs from

the others: ‘‘If the largest group say to me ‘‘Well, there are a few obstacles in this idea, then I would think to myself ‘‘Don’t they have a point?’’ And they probably do have a point.’’

Furthermore, the interviewees argue that this form of decision-making is possible because of Cooperative’s size. They share the opinion that if Cooperative grows, adjustments in the decision-making process may have to be made. A member said: ‘‘If you are going to grow, then you need to discuss with each other whether we need to organize this differently at some point.’’ ... ‘‘The group we have now, we are small, ... you are flexible, and you can easily arrange things among yourselves, but with a very large group, you also get larger groups opposing each other when something would occur, so then you have to make rules, I think.’’ Another interviewee goes one step further and questions if deciding by consensus in a small cooperative is easier than making decisions democratically: ‘‘You can say it is easier to reach consensus, but it is incredibly much harder not to have consensus because then the cooperative’s existence is immediately threatened.’’ He stated that for a small cooperative like Cooperative it has fewer consequences when everyone is not against the decision. For example, when three members are against and two members are in favor of the decision, there is division. If a member, therefore, decides to leave the cooperative, the cooperative is falling apart.

### **Maintaining commitment**

Four main themes occur in the third category, maintaining commitment: sharing physical attributes, sharing mindset, external stakeholder engagement via individual leader, and involvement.

#### ***Sharing physical attributes based on reciprocity***

The members feel physically committed to Cooperative by sharing fishing licenses: ‘‘You can help each other with licenses.’’ The licenses are one of the reasons the fishers can carry out their yearly business plan. Through the licenses from the cooperative, fishers can fish on

different species each season so that the fish stock remains stable. Without the cooperative, each fisher should have these various licenses themselves. The licenses are part of a common sustainability goal: integrated fishing.

Noteworthy, sharing fishing licenses is not possible when the paperwork is not well organized. According to the interviewees, only the chair has the education, work experience, and skills to handle the amount of paperwork for Cooperative. Analyzing the meeting minutes shows the time before the current chair was formally the chair, he had already taken his role in administrative work such as preparing registration forms for members, regulations within the cooperative, and registration of sharing fishing licenses. Then and now he takes care of the administrative work such as quotations and other regulatory parts, whereas the other members focus on the executive part such as implementing projects. The former member gives a clear explanation of the reciprocity in Cooperative: “They also helped each other. C1 could work with papers and the other could make fishing nets. And what one could not do, the other did, and vice versa.” And a current member confirms this: “All the paperwork does C1, but we do the practical part.”

Secondly, knowledge is shared within the cooperative, as well as with the external environment such as universities. External stakeholders such as universities are physically committed to the cooperative because Cooperative provides the ability to conduct research in their fisheries. Cooperative is very approachable to these stakeholders because they make time to conduct research in their fisheries, unlike other full-time fisher organizations. A member tells: “We already do a lot of that (research), and other fishermen, ... often full-time professional fishermen, they do not have time for that (research) at all.”

### ***Sharing mindset***

The members and external stakeholders are mentally committed through a shared mindset. All members share the opinion that it is possible to remain or improve the fish stock and make a

living from it at the same time. As the chair explained: ‘‘We are a small group of colleagues who know and can show that it does work and that you can, in a very pleasant way, make an income from it.’’ An external stakeholder confirms this by saying that ‘‘Cooperatives have the advantages that ... if you had to change that you still have some security that you can continue to earn your living.’’

Lastly, all interviewees share the assumption that a potential member or stakeholder only will reach out to the cooperative and stay committed when they share the sustainable principles. Indeed, in the existence of Cooperative, it has not yet occurred that a potential member or stakeholder did not share the sustainable mindset of the cooperative.

#### *External stakeholder engagement via individual leader*

As well as handling the paperwork, the chair has the role to keep the external stakeholders engaged according to the interviewees. This is again because this person could build a network because of his professional background. The fact that the chair is the only person in Cooperative who can and wants to manage the paperwork and stakeholder engagement makes him seen as an indispensable actor. One member said: ‘‘I have already said to him, I think we have a very big problem if you drop out of something like that happens, I said: ‘‘And then? Who should do it then?’’ because that does pose a problem.’’ The chair himself is aware of this weakness: ‘‘For the continuation of the cooperative, it is a weakness that there is one person who is ... quite distinct from the rest, who cannot be easily replaced by another member or board member. This is not good. ... We also agree on that.’’ And ‘‘Effectively, I am just the leader of the whole stuff, ... I think the other see it that way too because they say ... if you drop out then it stops. That is a fragile thing.’’ ... ‘‘I fear I am also a bit of the constant factor.’’

Additionally, the external stakeholders as well as the members have direct contact with the chair. A current member says that the chair ‘‘invests in good relationships’’ and the former member and external stakeholder both have (still) close contact with the chair. The meeting

minutes show that the chair, also when he was not formally titled as chair, took the role of stakeholder engagement.

Lastly, all members state that their personnel on the boat, who are sometimes hired, are formally and informally not committed to Cooperative. The staff only knows that the fisher is a member of Cooperative, and sometimes what Cooperative values. The members do not see committing personnel as needed because the members themselves are the shipowner and therefore decide what action will be taken. The chair states that it is important to give information about Cooperative to fellow workers so that they know what the cooperative can offer them if they want to join sometime.

### ***Involvement***

However, the chair is the first person for stakeholders to contact, members see it as their role to ensure that everyone feels involved in Cooperative. For example, by informing each other about projects and sharing opinions, views, and insights. The meeting minutes analyses show that the members are up to date on each other's work because at the beginning of the meetings the members talk about their fisheries and projects. The members' work is shortly described in the minutes. All members indicate that from the first moment you are a member of the cooperative you can introduce new ideas and they are happy to hear your opinion, especially when you have a great experience. Another way of involvement is by signaling when someone is less present. Especially during Covid and online meetings involvement was important. For example, one of the members stated: "With Covid, with Skype, afterward you say: "we have to involve this person a bit more, we have to be more attentive", so in that way you keep each other focused."

### **Summary**

On the one hand, one person is seen as the leader and indispensable actor of the cooperative by the members and the leader himself. He is seen as the leader of the cooperative due to his roles

in the cooperative, which are handling the paperwork and engaging stakeholders. On the other hand, all three tasks are shared or have a shared component. Firstly, the members share the responsibility for introducing and holding on to the sustainable principles (setting direction). Secondly, the members make the decisions by consensus which means that no one is against the made decision (creating alignment). Thirdly, the members share physical attributes based on reciprocity and mindset and involve each other to stay committed to the cooperative (maintaining commitment).

Figure A1 shows a visual summary of the results.

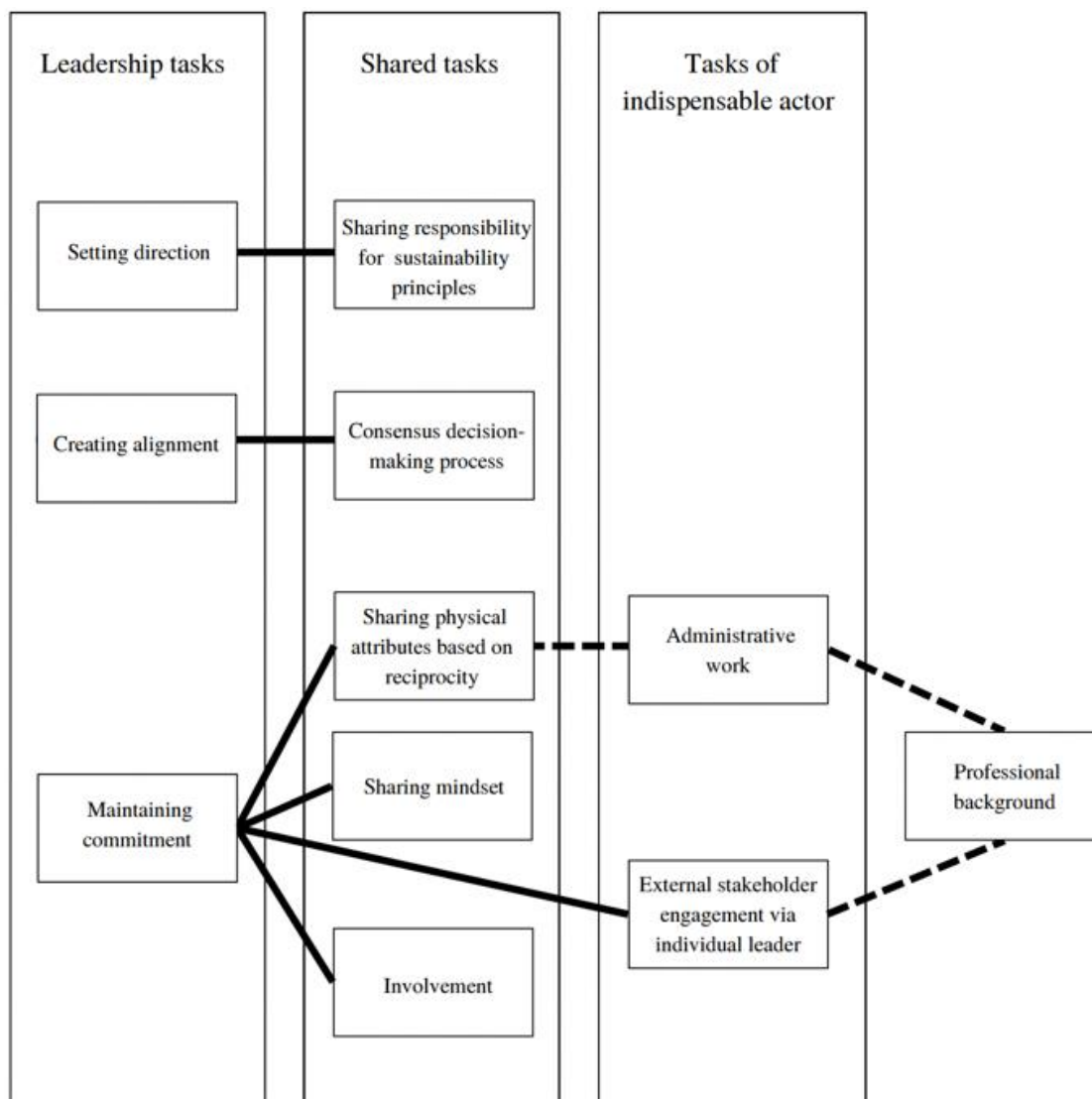


Figure A1: Visual summary of results

## DISCUSSION

The results show a division in leadership: shared tasks and tasks conducted by an indispensable individual.

Metcalf & Benn (2013) stated that leadership does not have to be managerial, but in this case, the formal titled "chair" of Cooperative is seen as the leader. However, analyzing the meeting minutes shows that the present chair, who is seen as the leader, already practiced the roles of handling paperwork and stakeholder engagement before he was formally titled as chair. This corroborates with the statement of Metcalf & Benn (2013). There can be concluded that a function title does not make you a leader in a small sustainable cooperative.

Furthermore, all members, including the leader himself, agree that he owes his position partly to his professional background such as education, work experience, and the ability to develop skills. Huang (2013) shows that system thinking, which is necessary for CSR outcomes, is likely to be linked to educational level. Additionally, a cross-functional career in areas where the leader has had to deal with different stakeholders contributes to sustainable leadership (de Haan, Jansen, & Lighthart, 2015).

Stakeholder engagement is one role that is performed by the leader of Cooperative. This task is seen as "a necessity and opportunity" in sustainable leadership because it is seen as a need to reach beyond the cooperative itself and it is an opportunity to influence other organizations toward sustainability (Quinn and Dalton, 2009). The importance of this role explains why the leader of the cooperative is seen as the leader by the members and a stakeholder, despite this, he practices only one part of one leadership task. It can be argued that stakeholder engagement is perceived as so important, or at least in conjunction with processing paperwork, that it keeps others from seeing themselves or the group as the leader.

Stakeholder engagement and processing paperwork are evidently seen as leadership tasks by the members of Cooperative. An emergent leader is not formally appointed as the



leader but is seen as a leader because they ‘‘exhibit behavior that others perceive as leader-like.’’ (Metcalf & Benn, 2012). In this case, the leader does not have different behavior, but different tasks. This research highlights two areas of emergent leadership, based on behavior, and based on tasks. The three leadership tasks that are examined are shared, this is what the literature calls ‘‘Leadership of Unity’’. This type of leadership involves collaboration on human personal values and organizational culture values and comes to discussion-based agreements (Metcalf & Benn, 2012).

One of the key characteristics of cooperatives is equal voting rights (Martinez-Leon, et al. 2020), and Henahan & Anderson (1994) state that ‘‘voting is assumed to be the major form of decision control in cooperative’’. This statement seems to concern large cooperatives more than small cooperatives. On paper, the members of Cooperative vote, but in practice in some cases, a look at each other is enough. Formal voting is then not necessary. Therefore, this research argues that formal voting in small cooperatives is not a major form of decision control in cooperatives. The agreement, on the other hand, is a major form of decision control. Sometimes members have to vote to come to an agreement, but this research shows that conversing is more important and voting is not even necessary anymore.

One interviewee stated that it may be necessary for a small cooperative to make decisions by consensus. A clarification is that the members are aware of the consequences of not making decisions by consensus and know that they need each other to reach financial benefits (Gepken-Jager, 2022) and the common sustainable goal (Doesum, 2009). In this way, they could feel the urge to come to a consensus together.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion is that collaboration in leadership contributes to the transition towards sustainable business models in small fisher’s cooperatives operating in the north of the

Netherlands. Leadership in this small sustainable cooperative manifest itself in collaboration and in one person who can be seen as an indispensable actor. This latter is seen as a weakness and therefore does not contribute to the transition toward sustainable business models.

All three tasks lay in the roles of all members of the cooperative. Setting direction can be translated to introducing and adhering to the sustainability principles of the cooperative which is a shared responsibility. The same applies to creating alignment which is connected to the consensus decision-making process. The fact that this cooperative decides by consensus corroborates with Reynolds (1997) that cooperatives are consensus-based organizations. The third task of a sustainable leader is to maintain commitment. Maintaining commitment is seen as a shared responsibility because members share physical attributes based on reciprocity and mindset and involve each other. However, keeping stakeholders engaged, in this case study, is the role of the individual leader. The way these tasks are shaped in the cooperative can be seen as shared leadership, according to the definition of Pearce & Conger (2003b). These tasks are shaped in a dynamic and interactive process among the members of the cooperative to achieve a common organizational goal.

Noteworthy, even though the individual leader performs only one part of one task of sustainable leadership, stakeholder engagement, he is seen as the indispensable actor of the cooperative. The reason for this is that he is the only person who can and wants to manage this, and paperwork.

### **Contributions**

On the one hand, this research is a conformation of research that is already conducted, but for an alternative business form: small cooperatives. Former researchers have shown that leadership does not have to be managerial (Metcalf & Benn, 2012) and that professional background such as education and work experience contribute to leadership (Huang, 2013) (de

Haan, Jansen, & Lighthart, 2015). On the other hand, this research shows that some roles and tasks outweigh others, or that it is not only about who does the tasks but also whether someone else can do them. This research shows that if someone practices tasks that no one else can or wants to fulfill, this person is seen as a leader, even though most defined leadership tasks are practiced by the collective. Furthermore, this research contributes by highlighting differences between small and large cooperatives, especially in decision-making processes. The size of a cooperative influences the decision-making processes. Additionally, this research can contribute to another discipline such as organizational behavior science studies because this research investigated how people in cooperatives/groups behave and lead, and how decisions are made.

Besides academic contributions, this research contributes practically. This research can be the start for opening dialogues in small cooperatives about the role of leadership and decision-making processes in their cooperative. It is important to converse about leadership in small cooperatives because this research shows that a leader as an indispensable actor in small cooperatives can endanger the continued existence of the cooperative. When a cooperative is aware of this weakness, they can choose to find a solution together.

### **Limitations**

Firstly, this research relies on a very specific target group, namely small fishers' cooperatives in the north of the Netherlands consisting of men-members. Due to the size of the cooperative, the members are forced to become board members too, besides cooperative members. This is extraordinary for a cooperative because the structure of a cooperative consists of a board that needs the votes of the members to make decisions about specific topics. What topics need members' control is specified in the articles of association. In addition to the number of members in this cooperative, this research also specifies itself to be cooperative in the north of

the Netherlands. During this research, it became clear that culture, region, and/or personal characteristics can influence the role of leadership in a small cooperative. These aspects continued the question whether gender influences group- or leadership roles. Lastly, not every country knows the legal form of cooperative, which is an additional reason why this research is only applicable in the Netherlands. Overall, this case study represents a small group of cooperatives, and thus a small group of organizations overall. In practice, fewer organizations benefit from this research because of its uniqueness. However, the uniqueness of this case shows in-depth results of its complexity, instead of a global overview.

Secondly, this research used a single case study approach. This influence the reliability and validity of the research because it is less predictable that the same findings present in another small cooperative. Therefore, a multiple case study approach would be a better fit. However, due to limited time, a comprehensive single case study was conducted because all members, a former member, and an external stakeholder were interviewed. Besides, meeting minutes were analyzed as additional evidence of the interview results.

### **Future research**

Firstly, it is likely to assume that the characteristics of the group members themselves influence the role of leadership in the cooperative. The first characteristic to discuss is the size of the cooperative. The members mentioned that making agreements in a smaller group is easier than in a bigger group. Therefore, they do not use processes for example for making decisions, but they think it is necessary to do so if the group is bigger. Additionally, in this way, it is easier to contact other members and stay informed about each other businesses and projects. Assuming that the size of the group indeed affects the decision-making process and involvement, further research could investigate what a minimum and a maximum number of persons in a group are before a tipping point influences the role of leadership. The second characteristic of the

cooperative, which is more focused on the members themselves, is the type of people in the group. The members of the cooperative live and fish in the north of the Netherlands. Some members notice that most members of the group are characterized by approachability and soberness. Additionally, Cooperative has only men-members. Further research can investigate if people in a small non-northern cooperative in the Netherlands differ in collaborating because of different personalities depending on culture, region, personal characteristics, and gender. For example, further research can compare a small fishers' cooperative in the provinces south- and north of Holland to this cooperative to discover if culture and region influence the role of leadership. Additionally, further research can investigate which personality characteristics in a cooperative favor the way of leading that contributes to a sustainable business model in the fishing industry.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Interview guide

#### 1. Opening

1.1 For how long are you a fisher now?

1.2 For how long are you a member of the cooperative Fisher from the Coast?

#### 2. Sustainable principles

2.1 In what way were the sustainable principles of the cooperative introduced to you?

- *In different stages -> signing up for cooperative, during membership*

2.2 How do you discuss or criticize sustainable principles that are integrated into the cooperative?

2.3 Besides the sustainable principles that are already integrated into the cooperative, how do you discuss new sustainable principles?

2.4 What is the role of the leader in this?

#### 3. Decision-making process

3.1 When are decisions made?

3.2 When are decisions made by the board?

3.3 When are decisions made by the members?

- *Is there a difference since cooperative members and board members are the same people?*

3.4 How are decisions made by the board?

3.5 How are decisions made by the members?

- *Democratically, consensually, consent*

- *Is there a difference since cooperative members and board members are the same people?*

3.6 What is the role of the leader in this?

4. Employees and stakeholder engagement

4.1 How are you, as a member, committed to the cooperative?

- *Physically and mentally*

4.2 How are the external stakeholders committed to the cooperative?

- *Physically and mentally*

4.3 What is the role of the leader in this?

5. Closure

5.1 What are you most proud of as a member of the cooperative?

## APPENDIX B: Code of Consent Interview (English & Dutch)



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*Informed Consent/Toestemmingsformulier*

### **Subject/Onderwerp:**

*The Role of Leadership in Dutch Cooperatives towards sustainability:  
 Case Study of "Cooperative".*

De rol van leiderschap in Nederlandse coöperaties om een bijdrage te leveren aan duurzame bedrijfsmodellen.

### **Researcher/Onderzoeker:**

- Linde van Wichen
  - Tel: +31612655878
  - Email: l.van.wichen@student.rug.nl

### **Introduction/Introductie:**

- *You are being asked to take part in a research study as part of our Master's program in Sustainable Entrepreneurship at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. This form is provided so that you may read and understand the reasons why you might or might not want to participate in the research. Your participation is voluntary.*
- U bent gevraagd om deel te nemen aan een thesis onderzoek van een student, Linde van Wichen, van de Masteropleiding "Sustainable Entrepreneurship" aan de Rijksuniversiteit van Groningen, Campus Fryslân. In dit formulier is gemaakt zodat u kan lezen en begrijpen waarom u wel of niet wilt deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Uw deelname is vrijwillig.

### **Purpose of the Study/Doel van het onderzoek:**

- *The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of leadership in sustainable cooperatives in the agriculture sector in the Netherlands.*
- Het doel van dit onderzoek is om de rol van leiderschap binnen Nederlandse duurzame coöperaties in de agrarische sector beter te begrijpen.

### **Data Collection and Use/Data verzameling en gebruik:**

- *Recordings of the interview will be made. The recordings will then be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher;*  
Er zullen opnames van het interview worden gemaakt. De opnames zullen worden getranscribeerd en geanalyseerd door Linde van Wichen.
- *After the interviews are transcribed, the recordings will be deleted. Furthermore, the interview data will only be used for this research project and nothing else;*  
Nadat de interviews zijn getranscribeerd, zullen de opnames worden verwijderd. Verder zal de interviewdata alleen gebruikt worden voor dit onderzoek en voor niks anders.
- *Quotes from the transcription may be used as verbatim in the thesis;*  
Citaten uit het transcript kunnen woordelijk gebruikt worden in het eindrapport van het onderzoek.
- *You will have access to this final report and the transcription;*  
U heeft toegang tot het eindrapport van het onderzoek en de transcripties.
- *For confidentiality purposes, any personal information will be made unrecognizable;*

Wegens privacy en vertrouwelijkheid, zal persoonlijke informatie anoniem/onherkenbaar worden gemaakt.

**Your Rights as Participant:**

- *You have the right to deny answering any questions;*
- *You have the right to step out of the research project at any time;*
- *In case of an online interview, you have the right to deny video recording, audio recordings will still be made in this case;*

**Jouw rechten als deelnemer:**

- U heeft het recht om te weigeren om antwoord te geven op vragen
- U heeft het recht om zich op elk moment van het onderzoek terug te trekken
- Mocht er een online interview plaatsvinden, dan heeft u het recht om beeld opname te weigeren. Audio opname zal nog steeds worden gebruikt.

**Contact Information/Contact Informatie:**

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

Als u vragen heeft tijdens het onderzoek, of u ervaart nadelige effecten als resultaat van uw deelname, dan mag ik altijd contact opnemen met Linde van Wichem. De contactgegevens staan op de eerste pagina van dit formulier.

**Voluntary Participation/Vrijwillige Deelname:**

*Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.*

Uw deelname in dit onderzoek is vrijwillig. Het is aan u om te bepalen of u wel of niet wil deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Als u besluit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek, dan mag u dit formulier ondertekenen. Nadat u dit formulier heeft ondertekend, mag u zich nog steeds terugtrekken uit het onderzoek, op elk moment, zonder reden. Terugtrekken uit het onderzoek zal geen invloed hebben op de relatie die u heeft met de onderzoeker. Als u zich terugtrekt voordat de data volledig is verzameld, dan zal de informatie verzameld door uw deelname worden verwijderd.

**Consent/Toestemming:**

*I have read and understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.*

Ik heb de gegeven informatie gelezen en begrepen, en de mogelijkheid gehad op vragen hierover te stellen. Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is en dat ik me op elk moment, zonder reden en kosten mag terugtrekken uit deelname van het onderzoek. Ik begrijp dat ik een kopie krijg van dit toestemmingsformulier. Ik doe vrijwillig mee aan dit onderzoek.

*Participant's Signature/Handtekening* Deelnemer \_\_\_\_\_ *Date/Datum*  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Researchers' Signature/Handtekening* Onderzoeker \_\_\_\_\_ *Date/Datum:*  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: Code of Consent Meeting Minutes (English and Dutch)

### *Informed Consent/Toestemmingsformulier*

#### **Subject/Onderwerp:**

*The Role of Leadership in Dutch Cooperatives towards sustainability.*

De rol van leiderschap in Nederlandse coöperaties om een bijdrage te leveren aan duurzame bedrijfsmodellen.



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#### **Researcher/Onderzoeker:**

- Linde van Wichen
- Tel: +31612655878
- Email: l.van.wichen@student.rug.nl

#### **Introduction/Introductie:**

- *You are being asked to deliver internal documents, such as meeting minutes, for a research study as part of our Master's program Sustainable Entrepreneurship at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. This form is provided so that you may read and understand the reasons why you might or might not want to participate in the research. Your participation is voluntary.*
- U bent gevraagd om interne documenten, zoals vergaderverslagen, te delen als onderdeel van een thesis onderzoek van een student, Linde van Wichen, van de Masteropleiding "Sustainable Entrepreneurship" aan de Rijksuniversiteit van Groningen, Campus Fryslân. In dit formulier is gemaakt zodat u kan lezen en begrijpen waarom u wel of niet wilt deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Uw deelname is vrijwillig.

#### **Purpose of the Study/Doel van het onderzoek:**

- *The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of leadership in sustainable cooperatives in the agriculture sector in the Netherlands.*
- Het doel van dit onderzoek is om de rol van leiderschap binnen Nederlandse duurzame coöperaties in de agrarische sector beter te begrijpen.

#### **Data Collection and Use/Data verzameling en gebruik:**

- *The minutes will only be read and analysed by Linde van Wichen and by no one else; De vergaderverslagen zullen alleen gelezen en geanalyseerd worden door Linde van Wichen en niemand anders.*
- *After reading and analysing the minutes, the original documents will be deleted. Furthermore, the minutes data will only be used for this research project and for nothing else; Nadat de vergaderverslagen zijn gelezen en geanalyseerd, zullen de originele documenten worden verwijderd. Verder zal deze data alleen gebruikt worden voor dit onderzoek en voor niets anders.*
- *With permission, quotes from the minutes may be used as verbatim in the thesis; Met toestemming kunnen de citaten uit de vergaderverslagen woordelijk gebruikt worden in het eindrapport van het onderzoek.*
- *You will have access to this final report; U heeft toegang tot het eindrapport van het onderzoek.*
- *For confidentiality purposes, any personal information will be made unrecognizable;*

Wegens privacy en vertrouwelijkheid, zal persoonlijke informatie anoniem/onherkenbaar worden gemaakt.

***Your Rights as Participant:***

- *You have the right to refuse the use of quotes from the minutes.*
- *You have the right to step out of the research project at any time.*

**Uw rechten als deelnemer:**

- U heeft het recht om het gebruik van citaten uit de vergaderverslagen te weigeren.
- U heeft het recht om zich op elk moment van het onderzoek terug te trekken.

**Contact Information/Contact Informatie:**

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

Als u vragen heeft tijdens het onderzoek, of u ervaart nadelige effecten als resultaat van uw deelname, dan mag ik altijd contact opnemen met Linde van Wichem. De contactgegevens staan op de eerste pagina van dit formulier.

**Voluntary Participation/Vrijwillige Deelname:**

*Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.*

Uw deelname in dit onderzoek is vrijwillig. Het is aan u om te bepalen of u wel of niet wil deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Als u besluit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek, dan mag u dit formulier ondertekenen. Nadat u dit formulier heeft ondertekend, mag u zich nog steeds terugtrekken uit het onderzoek, op elk moment, zonder reden. Terugtrekken uit het onderzoek zal geen invloed hebben op de relatie die u heeft met de onderzoeker. Als u zich terugtrekt voordat de data volledig is verzameld, dan zal de informatie verzameld door uw deelname worden verwijderd.

**Consent/Toestemming:**

*I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.*

Ik heb de gegeven informatie gelezen en begrepen, en de mogelijkheid gehad om vragen hierover te stellen. Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is en dat ik me op elk moment, zonder reden en kosten mag terugtrekken uit deelname van het onderzoek. Ik begrijp dat ik een kopie krijg van dit toestemmingsformulier. Ik doe vrijwillig mee aan dit onderzoek.

*Participant's Signature/Handtekening* Deelnemer \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date/Datum* \_\_\_\_\_

*Researchers' Signature/Handtekening Onderzoeker* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date/Datum:* \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D: List of Quotes: next page**



Sharing responsibility for sustainability principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M1: We have certain rules that we set for ourselves so that what we do is sustainable.</li> <li>- M1: And also that you keep an eye on each other and pay attention when something is not going well, then we immediately say to each other "I think there is going to be a hitch here or there."</li> <li>- M1: You do take responsibility together.</li> <li>- M2: At some point, you will find each other with those who want to, who have confidence in it, who think the same, and who are willing.</li> <li>- M2: Look, that's why I say what one considers sustainable, the other does not so, for example, one has a very different view of something than another. And that, yes, you can talk about that.</li> <li>- M3: In the end, the responsibility is on all of us, I think.</li> <li>- C1: You just have to constantly keep defining what you mean by your version of sustainability because otherwise, it becomes ... a dogma or something.</li> <li>- C1: A small group of colleagues who know and can show each other that it does work and that you can, in a very pleasant way, make an income from it.</li> <li>- C1: In the broadest sense, continue to observe what is happening in the water and work together as a group of colleagues and use each other's knowledge and observations.</li> <li>- C1: In this way, you redefine why you did become a cooperative.</li> </ul>
Consensus decision-making processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M1: Then we just have a discussion and so far it is basically been very friendly and yes, basically we both understand each other's point of view, but so far we can always get along.</li> <li>- M1: Then you have to make a decision and then basically everyone is at ease with that too, because everyone also knows where it came from.</li> <li>- M1: If the largest group says to me "Well, there are a few obstacles to this idea, then I would think to myself "Don't they have a point?" And they probably do have a point.</li> <li>- M1: 'If you are going to grow, then you need to discuss with each other whether we need to organize this differently at some point.' ... "The group we have now, we are small, ... you are flexible, and you can easily arrange things among yourselves, but with a very large group, you also get larger groups opposing each other when something would really occur, so then you have to make rules, I think.</li> <li>- M2: For us, it is not most votes count. It is more rational thinking, convincing someone. ... You do try to convince each other and it always works out.</li> <li>- M2: Decision-making absolutely does not lie in the hands of the leader because that would not really be a cooperative or a healthy governing body that you are in.</li> <li>- M2: And maybe, someone is sometimes less in favor of it, but we are all unanimous then. And yes, of course, people are different, so someone can have doubts, but then again because you are so small that piece of trust comes up, "Well, he says that for a reason, then I trust that he has thought about is well enough.</li> <li>- M2: Personally I have this too sometimes and I think "Well, I do not think it will work out" but then I hope I am wrong.</li> <li>- F1: A leader really should not direct that ... With words, you could turn that a little bit in one direction anyway. And that should not be the case. And I did not experience that there either.</li> <li>- E1: You can say it is easier to reach consensus, but it is incredibly much harder not to have consensus because then the cooperative's existence is immediately threatened.</li> <li>- C1: I think that is a strength ... That by sitting down together and taking the time to discuss everyone's perspective, you really grow joint decisions.</li> </ul>
Sharing physical attributes on reciprocity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M1: The cooperative also has the licenses to fish</li> <li>- M1: All the paperwork does C1, but we do the practical part</li> <li>- M3: It was legally a possibility to all bring our fishing licenses into that cooperative and then fish from one license or the other.</li> <li>- M3: You can help each other with licenses.</li> <li>- M3: We already do a lot of that (research), and other fishermen, ... often full-time professional fishermen, do not have time for that (research) at all.</li> <li>- F1: Actually, we passed that knowledge on to them.</li> <li>- F1: They also helped each other ... C1 could work with papers better and the other could make fishing nets. And what one could not do, the other did, and vice versa.</li> <li>- C1: In the broadest sense, continue to observe what is happening in the water and work together as a group of colleagues and use each other's knowledge and observations. ... And you have to solve the problem of the licenses, experientially ... to be flexible, to be able to move with nature, because then you just have to know a lot of different fisheries, but you also have to have licenses for a lot of different fisheries. Certain fishing gears. That's a policy, a legal problem. ... We've solved that.</li> <li>- C1: It is also useful that such a person knows to what extent the cooperative can support him/her in this. With knowledge, catching rights et cetera, and help.</li> </ul>
Administrative work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M1: The paper part of the cooperative goes mainly via C1.</li> <li>- M3: That is C1, he is basically always working on the paperwork, and that is quite a lot.</li> <li>- M3: No, I do not feel like doing paperwork because I do not know how it works.</li> <li>- F1: C1 could handle paperwork more.</li> </ul>
Sharing mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M2: The one who would really say something totally different does not join Cooperative.</li> <li>- E1: Cooperatives have the advantages that ... if you had to change that you still have some security that you can continue to earn your living.</li> <li>- C1: We are a small group of colleagues who know and can show that it does work and that you can, in a very pleasant way, make an income from it.</li> </ul>
External stakeholder engagement via individual leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M1: The first person to contact, would be C1.</li> <li>- M1: He already had a very large network and that's his thing. Of course, we also have contacts because you worked together in the past, etc., but in essence, from the cooperative part of the external part, that is kind of C1's thing so to speak.</li> <li>- M2: He invests in good relationships.</li> <li>- M3: Networks has C1 too, or he is taking care of all that.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- F1: I still have good contact with C1 ... if we do not know something or if there are problems somewhere, we still come together.</li> <li>- E1: When it comes to major business issues ... we still regularly spar. In that sense, you can say that outwardly, C1 certainly does fulfill that role as a leader.</li> </ul>
Indispensable actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M3: I have already said to him, I think we have a very big problem if you drop out of something like that happens, I said: "And then? Who should do it then?" because that does pose a problem."</li> <li>- C1: For the continuation of the cooperative, it is a weakness that there is one person who is ... quite distinct from the rest, who cannot be easily replaced by another member or board member. This is not good. ... We also agree on that.</li> <li>- C1: Effectively, I am just the leader of the whole stuff, ... I think the others see it that way too because they say ... if you drop out then it stops. That is a fragile thing." ... "I fear I am also a bit of the constant factor.</li> </ul>
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M1: With Covid, with Skype, afterward you say: "We have to involve this person a bit more, we have to be more attentive", so in that way you keep each other focused.</li> <li>- M1: Yes, it only has to be very simple, just an email: "hey, we're working on this, this is going on and these are the results."</li> <li>- M1: The connections are also short, of course. If there is an issue, we can immediately discuss ... there is someone who has a complaint or a problem and then we discuss how we are going to deal with it.</li> <li>- E1: In a small cooperative with three, everyone has to participate in a conversation otherwise you have a problem.</li> </ul>
Professional background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M3: He is well educated. And we are not. Yes, we did have school, but not like C1.</li> <li>- F1: In any case, it has to do with experience.</li> <li>- C1: That my prior education and experience make it a little easier for me to make a quotation.</li> <li>- C1: Prior education and work experience in addition to fishing, I think all of that may be equally important.</li> </ul>