

READING

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_IN YOUR GROUP PROJECT

Your project work during the opening week represents a playing field to explore the Cooperative Mind: You will work with students from various disciplines towards a common goal. The quality of cooperation depends on the level of motivation of those involved in terms of the topic, the task in hand and collaboration. This interdependence also works in the opposite direction: Good cooperation can motivate. In the following, you will find tools which will make it easier for you to cooperate as a project group in a diverse team.

– **Agreeing on shared working and communication methods**
General key words such as respect, recognition and reliability frequently come up with working methods which are desired in a group. These words leave a great deal of room for interpretation. For example, how exactly should we behave to show respect?

- Formulate clear agreements where the action requirements can be reviewed.
-> Instead of “Please treat me with more respect”, link the formulation to specific actions: “Please let me finish my sentence in future.” or: “Please ask me before using my bike.”

– **Developing common targets**
We intuitively develop our own concept of targets as soon as we are faced with a task. This often happens unconsciously and understandings of targets can differ widely between group members. The following steps help in the development of shared targets:

- Work out clear ideas of results: For any specific project, it is useful if the targets are measurable and understandable, specific and implementable, if a final deadline is defined for each target and if all targets are relevant to all parties involved.
- Modify targets which are too high: The unachievable can discourage. In such cases, it helps to define partial targets and consider where compromises might be made and what might be discarded or disregarded.

– **Roles within the team – and their reflection**
Depending on the arrangement of the group, we tend to take on a certain role intuitively. This can be justified in certain abilities, but can also be rooted in hierarchies and power structures between people. Cultivating an awareness of possible roles, discussion patterns and positions is a core element of successful cooperation.

- You may recognise the following roles in your group (cf. Gellert/Nowak 2007):
 - > Leader, facilitator: leads and structures, keeps an eye on the overall task and time-scale.
 - > Implementer, coordinator: develops specific and useful approaches and action plans; encourages the team during weak phases.
 - > Creative mind, initiator: is willing to try new things and full of ideas, including some unconventional ones.
 - > Team worker: ensures cohesion in the team, acts as integrator and helps a good working atmosphere.
 - > Perfectionist: completes processes or ensures they are completed; considers the details; ensures order; documents work if necessary; ensures quality and thoroughness.

Making these roles explicit and discussing them can help prevent misunderstandings.

- Self-questioning is suitable for reflecting on your own role in a group, which makes it easier to have a constructive encounter with hierarchies (see “Questioning Mind”):
 - > What is my own background? What perspective am I talking from?
 - > What discussion asymmetries could result from this? How much do I talk in the group and how much do the others talk?
 - > How do I talk? Which words and language do I use? Who is this excluding, if anyone?

THE COOPERATIVE MIND IN “VISIONING”
During the Opening Week, you will develop a visionary video with your project group. Visioning has creative parts. If we understand creativity as the interplay between *innovations* and *value*: Here, the function of the innovation, meaning the innovative creation of new ideas corresponds less to the group than the stable *evaluation* from the group. In this way, ideas from the group experience a comparison directly within it. Feedback (see below) plays an important role in conferring value to a vision. Criteria for a good vision which includes cooperation can be found in the “Visioning” handout.

THE COOPERATIVE MIND IN ”CRITIQUE”
Contrary to the popular definition, critique does not only cover a negative evaluation – it can also be used in a cooperative manner, for example, in the form of constructive feedback: The following small exercises can be helpful for your project work:

– **Practicing a listening stance (in pairs)**
Decide who will start to talk. Talk about your developed vision and possible related critical aspects. The other person listens for three minutes and shows they are listening in a concentrated manner through eye contact and affirmative comments. Then, the listening person recounts what they have heard (contents, structure, special features) - here, it is a question of recounting the pure content without giving advice, evaluations or similar. Then, change roles. Then, you can talk about how you perceived this exercise: What was easy, what was difficult? What was new for you?

– **Giving feedback**
A subgroup of your project group or an individual person who has worked something out describes where they stand, what they have done up until now, what they have yet to do and where there are difficulties. The following questions are a good starting point for the feedback that the rest of the group will give:

- Why is that important for you?
 - What did you want to say/express with that?
- The second stage is about the listeners’ response:
- What do I see? What is there? Here, we are only talking about describing!
 - What could there be more of? What could be improved?
 - What is wrong? Incorrect? Imprecise? Don’t be over-sensitive here; be factual
 - Something else which struck me...

COOPERATIVE MIND

Similar to the Questioning Mind the Cooperative Mind describes an attitude, a stance I can take to interact with my shared surroundings for the purpose of cooperation. Cooperation, derived from the Latin *cooperatio*, which means *interaction*, and therefore *acting together*, can be found in different contexts: People are already cooperating when they mutually greet each other, when they eat together, in traffic and especially in democratic action. We are born into social contexts, which involve certain rules, customs and value systems which both allow and require us to behave cooperatively (cf. Ostrom 1990; Tomassello 2010). Many of these rules and customs are unconsciously accepted by individuals in social contexts. However, I can also rethink certain behaviour patterns, scrutinise them, modify them and adopt them again. This adoption of social practices and values as well as their critical reflection are conditions for the success of cooperation. While many types of cooperation feed on implicitly shared values and behaviour patterns and therefore occur unconsciously, the concept of the Cooperative Mind is accompanied by the conscious confrontation with them. I therefore choose to accept a cooperative manner actively for cooperation in order to achieve a common goal. Following premises facilitate achieving a common goal in cooperation and characterise the Cooperative Mind: The equal participation of everyone in the process, the understanding of shared practices, the reflection of one's own actions and, not least, the open discussion about thoughts, understandings and actions.

These assumptions already show that accepting a cooperative manner in families, among friends, in teams and in society does not mean giving up your ability of independent judgement (see “Critique”) (cf. Arendt 1996). The unimaginable suffering under the National Socialist regime is a reminder of what can happen when people abandon their duty to make up their judgements and act according to them. Emancipation, self-determination and autonomy are key terms used for this type of independence (see for example *Enzyklopädie der Philosophie*, 2010).

The adoption of a cooperative attitude can be encouraged by practising certain competences. Such competences include, for example:

- Fundamental respect for the other, irrespective of sympathy
- Knowledge of different social contexts and their behaviour patterns
- The ability to interpret social behaviour appropriately
- A repertoire of patterns of interaction
- An awareness of perspective or accepting other perspectives in principle and being able to consider the interests of others
- Motivation and a desire to cooperate in order to work for the shared benefit of a group
- Recognising the value of common solutions to problems

When I intervene in the world as a Cooperative Mind, I go back to these competences and link them with the actual situation, the specific task and its context (see “Questioning Mind”).

_IN ACADEMIA

Research, teaching and learning are inconceivable without co-operation. This also applies in the case of an academic working alone at her desk, whose academic contribution can only arise and resonate when it ties into an already existing field of research, shaped by an academic community, in a comprehensible manner. However, each discipline and even subfields within disciplines vary in the ways they approach cooperation. Each discipline has its own perspective on what constitutes a relevant research question (see “Questioning Mind”). Resulting from that, each subject comes with its own pool of academic practices and methods that are considered valid for producing answers and knowledges.

One approach which has made cooperation the centrepiece of its theories and methods is transdisciplinary research, meaning research which works beyond subject boundaries and forms of knowledge. Transdisciplinary research describes a research approach from sustainability science which administers to the complexity of phenomena which cannot be divided into individual disciplines (cf. Dubielzig/Schaltegger 2004). Characteristic of such transdisciplinary collaboration is the close cooperation of various disciplines and participants from practice, to work on a societal challenge together. Such a societal challenge could be sustainable agriculture, for example, an even more specific example could be sustainable coffee cultivation in Honduras. To research this, the cooperation of the most varied of actors is required: Ecologists to incorporate scientific knowledge on the cultivation of coffee beans, coffee farmers and plantation owners to include their specific experiences and to implement common solution approaches, economists and geographers to research value chains, trade relationships and components of the regional economy. The foundation for this cooperative collaboration is a shared understanding of the problem between the actors as well as the formulation of objectives understandable to all parties which communicate between the different knowledge disciplines and experiences (cf. Jaeger-Erben et al. 2018). *ibid.*). The abilities of the Cooperative Mind named above, such as sensitivity to different perspectives in the world and the ability to handle communication in different languages and social contexts, are key competences which make such transdisciplinary collaboration easier.

With this example, it also becomes clear that research and science are not exclusively defined by rivalry and competition. It is true that academics frequently compete over the most meaningful findings and most ground-breaking discoveries, but in cooperation they tend to find solutions and make discoveries that are not within an individual's reach.

_IN SOCIETY

In recent times of increasing globalisation and digitisation, the qualities of the Cooperative Mind are of rising importance because they strengthen societal processes of negotiation about how we should shape our mutual life on a shared planet. Here, the Cooperative Mind can be understood as an alternative to the so-called Homo economicus – a conception of man which is based on the assumption that man is an egoistical, rational utility maximiser; in this logic, competition and efficiency are the basis of action for the individuals of a society (cf. Graupe 2013). According to Hartmut Rosa, however, such logic leads to “Naturzerstörung und Gemeinschaftszersetzung” [the destruction of nature and the degradation of communities] (Rosa 2016: 512), which is manifested in increasing social inequality and the global climate crisis. A cooperative manner, however, does not just mean becoming conscious of your own interests, but also perceiving the interests of others and developing common solutions for these societal challenges. This is central in co-shaping a sustainable and democratic society. Democracy represents a particularly elaborate form of cooperative practice: It both relies on and enables participation.

In recent years, numerous grassroots movements, initiatives and organisations have been founded which push the aspect of cooperation into focus to enable a good life for all. Important examples are the commons movement, community-supported agriculture, cooperative living projects or also a few manifestations of sharing economies (cf. I.L.A. Kollektiv 2019).

