



ICA General Assembly

*“ICA Research Conference Committee*

*Singapore, October 2007*

Address by Ivano Barberini, President, International Co-operative Alliance (ICA)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

I thank you for your kind invitation. The work carried out by the ICA Research Committee provides a great contribution in looking at new ways to strengthen the “raison d’etre” of cooperation in the 21st century and for the effectiveness of its actions in society and the market.

The questions motivating this conference require answers – concrete and precise – from the nature itself of cooperative organizations to their way of working.

Overall, the cooperative movement, throughout its history, has always known how to respond to the new needs of individuals, making them the main players in successful business experiences, bringing together efficiency and solidarity.

When done in the right way, the contribution of the members, stakeholders and personnel, in planning new systems in production,

services and offer, gives rise to a comparative advantage for the company involved.

Innovation is generally held to be an essential factor. Yet, it remains quite complex and difficult in cooperative organizations because of the decision-making processes based on consensus and the fact, that they must respond to higher social expectations compared to capital companies.

However, the willingness to introduce on-going innovation is not enough. It may make it easier to achieve the desired results but it cannot avoid obsolescence and crises.

Only the combination of continual innovation and radical innovation can produce a true organizational change. It is always results from day-to-day and medium and long-term actions.

For a company, radical innovation is a change in paradigms and in general points of reference that also include daily actions. This means innovation in the key products and processes, removing the old unproductive elements, and rebuilding an identity. With these 3 factors we can develop the participation of all in the strategic plan.

Therefore, each innovative process presupposes a change in the mentality of the company – opening up to the new and the consequent risks and the development of a way of thinking that encourages an interaction between the specific and the general, in an international perspective. This means developing a generative thinking and not merely, an adaptive one.

We all know it's easier to be innovative when we are facing a crisis. However, it's much more difficult when it comes from an overall vision and, sometimes, from an even more complex interpretation of short and long term scenarios. In the former, it is the need, in the latter, the mentality.

We must begin with the premise that innovation is not innate, it requires the right conditions.

Experience has taught us that resistance to change is unavoidable, is part of human nature. We need to recognize this, understand the basis and manage the ways and forms that will allow us to remove the obstacles. A cooperative organization needs to build consensus, patiently and clearly, listening to the reasons and concerns that arise. This is how the energy needed is activated into transforming the processes, at the right moment.

The basic factor for the introduction of radical innovation in a cooperative organization is the continual evolution of values and a strong and clearly visible identity, so that people are able to perceive the actions of a business, as well as cooperative subject. To be successful, innovation should also be guided by values.

We must foster a commitment developing within a business operation that respects ethics and rights. The mentality of innovation should be confirmed and spread as a means for participation and social quality.

Moreover, the choice to change requires that the controls work – consistency in values is never shown at the one time, by all.

Dear Friends,

These ideas concerning the topics under discussion have only one purpose - to improve and foster your commitment to developing studies and proposals that aid the cooperative organization to individuate the conditions and the right time to innovate.

The sharing of knowledge and experiences remains the best way to develop ideas, creativity and innovation, and focus on continuously improving, empowering and mobilizing people. This networking, consistently carried out, increases the members sense of being useful to ICA.

There is a vital need for this and all our organization is extremely grateful.

Many thanks and 'Buon lavoro'!

