

## Management strengthening strategies for transport cooperatives: a case study in Riobamba

Estrategias de fortalecimiento de la gestión de las cooperativas de transporte: un estudio de caso en Riobamba

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### ABSTRACT

Transport cooperatives face administrative challenges that affect their efficiency and competitiveness. This study focuses on the Interprovincial Transport Cooperative "Transvencedores" of Riobamba, Ecuador, with the objective of designing an administrative strengthening plan to improve its management and service. The research, with a qualitative and descriptive approach, used surveys and interviews with 25 staff members and 384 users, applying tools such as the SWOT matrix and the internal (EFI) and external factor evaluation (EFE) matrices to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The results revealed significant administrative problems, such as the lack of process automation, poor internal communication and the absence of a clear organizational philosophy. It was concluded that the cooperative requires ongoing staff training strategies, implementation of new technologies to control activities, and improved internal communication.

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These measures are essential to improve operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, positioning the cooperative as a leader in interprovincial transportation in Riobamba.

**Keywords:** Transportation cooperatives, administrative strengthening, organizational management, SWOT analysis

## RESUMEN

Las cooperativas de transporte se enfrentan a retos administrativos que afectan a su eficiencia y competitividad. Este estudio se centra en la Cooperativa Interprovincial de Transporte "Transvencedores" de Riobamba, Ecuador, con el objetivo de diseñar un plan de fortalecimiento administrativo para mejorar su gestión y servicio. La investigación, con un enfoque cualitativo y descriptivo, utilizó encuestas y entrevistas a 25 funcionarios y 384 usuarios, aplicando herramientas como la matriz FODA y las matrices de evaluación de factores internos (EFI) y externos (EFE) para identificar fortalezas, debilidades, oportunidades y amenazas. Los resultados revelaron importantes problemas administrativos, como la falta de automatización de los procesos, la escasa comunicación interna y la ausencia de una filosofía organizativa clara. Se concluyó que la cooperativa requiere estrategias de formación continua del personal, la implantación de nuevas tecnologías para controlar las actividades y la mejora de la comunicación interna. Estas medidas son esenciales para mejorar la eficiencia operativa y la satisfacción del cliente, posicionando a la cooperativa como líder en el transporte interprovincial en Riobamba.

**Palabras clave:** Cooperativas de transporte, fortalecimiento administrativo, gestión organizacional, análisis FODA

## INTRODUCTION

Transportation is an essential element for mobility and economic development in any region (Escalona, 2020). In Ecuador, transport cooperatives play a crucial role in

interprovincial connectivity, facilitating the movement of people for various activities such as trade, work, tourism and leisure (Maza-Avila and Agámez-Arias, 2012). However, these cooperatives face numerous administrative challenges that affect their efficiency and competitiveness in an increasingly demanding market (Tapia, 2020). Globalization and technological progress offer significant opportunities, but also impose new demands and complexities in the organizational management of these entities (Barrutia Barreto, 2023).

In addition, several studies highlight the importance of internal communication. Fluid and effective communication is essential to align all members with the cooperative's objectives and ensure that they understand the board's decisions. Implementing modern communication systems, such as digital platforms and regular meetings, facilitates the distribution of information and fosters an environment of collaboration and transparency (Prietto Villalobos & Revilla Valle, 2024).

Another crucial aspect is the continuous training of personnel. The idea of investing in training and professional development programs for their employees and partners should be contemplated by managers. These trainings should include administrative management, customer service, technology management and road safety (Lara, Fierro, & Zárate, 2020). A well-trained staff not only improves service quality, but also increases motivation and commitment to the cooperative. This is reflected in improved operational efficiency and customer satisfaction (Vidaurre Sandoval & Navarro Buendia, 2023).

Modernization of management systems is another key factor identified by several authors. The automation of administrative processes, such as route management, fleet control and accounting management, can reduce errors, improve efficiency and provide real-time data for decision making (Ramírez Roldán, 2019). The adoption of advanced technologies, such as GPS systems and business management software, can significantly transform the daily operations of the cooperative, allowing for more efficient and effective management (Zapata Cortés, Arango Serna, & Adarme Jaimes, 2010).

In addition, developing a clear organizational philosophy is vital for management strengthening. Clearly defining and communicating the cooperative's mission, vision, and values can guide strategic decisions, strengthen corporate culture, and improve internal cohesion. A well-established organizational philosophy shared among all members is crucial to guide the cooperative's actions toward achieving its long-term objectives (García López & Díaz González Borja, 2023).

Likewise, strengthening the relationship with users is another outstanding strategy, conducting periodic customer satisfaction surveys, implementing loyalty programs and ensuring high quality customer service are essential to understand and satisfy users' needs. Continuous feedback from users allows the cooperative to adjust and improve its services, which is fundamental to maintaining competitiveness in the market (Vera, Arriagada, Hernández, & Munizaga, 2023).

The Interprovincial Transport Cooperative "Transvencedores", located in Riobamba, Ecuador, is one of the many cooperatives facing these challenges. With more than 45 years of experience in the field of interprovincial transportation, the cooperative offers its users the availability to travel to different places on rotating schedules with comfortable units, with customer satisfaction as its main objective. However, despite its history and recognition, the cooperative has significant administrative problems that hinder its growth and the achievement of its organizational objectives.

Among the problems identified are the lack of process automation, poor internal communication and the absence of a clear organizational philosophy. These problems not only affect the cooperative's operational efficiency, but also negatively influence customer satisfaction and the organization's competitiveness. Lack of automation of administrative processes leads to operational inefficiencies, while poor internal communication can result in a lack of cohesion and coordination among employees. In addition, the absence of a clear organizational philosophy can lead to a lack of direction and shared purpose among cooperative members.

The main objective of this study is to design an administrative strengthening plan for the "Transvencedores" Cooperative in order to optimize its resources and improve its efficiency and effectiveness. This plan aims to address the administrative problems identified through the implementation of specific strategies, such as continuous training for personnel, the adoption of new technologies for activity control, and the improvement of internal communication. It is expected that these measures will contribute to improving the internal management of the cooperative, thereby increasing its competitiveness and its ability to offer a high quality service to its users.

Therefore, the importance of this study lies in its potential to provide a clear and structured roadmap for the administrative improvement of the cooperative. By addressing current weaknesses and taking advantage of identified opportunities, the "Transvencedores" Cooperative will be able to position itself as a leader in interprovincial transport in Riobamba, offering more efficient and satisfactory services to its users. This study can also serve as a model for other transport cooperatives in Ecuador and the region, facing similar challenges and seeking to improve their administrative and operational management.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The methodology used in this study adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach (Valle, Manrique, & Revilla, 2022), aimed at understanding and improving the management of the Interprovincial Transportation Cooperative "Transvencedores" in Riobamba. The methodological process was developed in several phases. The research design was structured under a qualitative and descriptive approach, selected because it allowed an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the members of the cooperative and its users, providing a detailed understanding of the administrative problems and areas in need of improvement.

The study population included all members of the administrative and operational personnel of the "Transvencedores" Cooperative, as well as users of the transportation service. A purposive sample of 25 staff members and 384 users of the cooperative was selected. This sample was chosen to obtain a broad and diverse representation of internal and external perspectives on the operation of the cooperative. Two main techniques were used for data collection: surveys and interviews. The surveys were administered to both cooperative staff and users. The survey questions were designed to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) related to the management and service of the cooperative. The interviews were conducted with a selection of key members of the administrative staff, providing greater depth and context to the data obtained through the surveys.

The main instrument used was a structured questionnaire, designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire included both open and closed questions, covering various areas of the cooperative's administration, such as internal communication, process automation and customer satisfaction. In addition, semi-structured interview guides were used for the interviews with administrative personnel, allowing for in-depth exploration of the key issues identified in the surveys. Data collection was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, surveys were distributed to cooperative staff and service users. The staff surveys were conducted in person, while the user surveys were distributed both at the cooperative's service points and through electronic media. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key members of the administrative staff. The interviews were conducted at the cooperative's offices, and each session lasted approximately one hour.

Data collected through surveys and interviews were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. Survey responses were tabulated and statistically analyzed to identify trends and patterns. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the content analysis method, identifying recurring and significant themes that provided a deeper understanding of administrative problems and possible solutions. Tools such as the SWOT matrix and the internal (EFI) and external factor evaluation (EFE) matrices were used for data analysis. These tools made it possible to identify and evaluate the cooperative's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, providing a solid basis for the development of the administrative strengthening plan.

## RESULTS

In order to start implementing the plan, a situational analysis of the cooperative was carried out using various evaluation tools, including the Internal Factors Evaluation Matrix, the External Factors Evaluation Matrix and the SWOT Matrix. The results obtained and their analysis are presented below.

**Table 1: Internal Factors Evaluation Matrix**

FACTORS	WEIGHT	RATING	T WEIGHTED
<b>Strengths</b>			
F1. Presence of physical offices	0.07	3	0.21
F2. Operational personnel with valid enabling documents	0.06	3	0.19
F3. Staff willingness to change and improve	0.06	4	0.25
F4. Semi-modern units	0.06	3	0.19
F5. Efficient accounting management	0.07	4	0.25
F6. Internal savings generated by members' contributions	0.06	3	0.19
<b>Weaknesses</b>			
D1. Poor internal communication	0.06	2	0.13
D2. Low publicity of the cooperative	0.06	1	0.06
D3. Minimal teamwork	0.06	1	0.06
D4. No automation in the processes	0.07	2	0.14
D5. Lack of a philosophy in the cooperative	0.06	1	0.06
D6. Obsolete activity management and control system.	0.07	2	0.14
<b>TOTAL</b>	1.00	31	1.87

Table 1 shows the internal factors evaluation matrix with a score of 1.87, indicating that the cooperative is weak internally. It is suggested that the cooperative focus on strengthening the weaknesses that retard its growth, such as improving internal communication, publicity, teamwork and automation of administrative processes.

**Table 2: External Factors Evaluation Matrix**

Factors	Weight	Rating	T-weighted
<b>Opportunities</b>			
O1. External financing for renovation of units	0.05	4	0.22
O2. Increase in the number of users demanding the service	0.06	4	0.25
O3. Development of new technologies for activity control	0.05	4	0.22
O4. Training agreements	0.07	3	0.21
O5. Development of control methods for the route	0.05	4	0.22
<b>Threats</b>			
A1. Increase in fuel prices	0.07	1	0.07
A2. Increase in informal transportation	0.06	2	0.14

A3. Delay in local economic development	0.05	2	0.10
A4. Increase in the cost of maintenance and spare parts for the units.	0.07	2	0.14
A5. Increase in social insecurity	0.06	2	0.12
<b>TOTAL</b>	1.00	22	1.45

The result of the External Factors Evaluation Matrix shown in Table 2 was 1.45, indicating that the organization has significant opportunities to maintain and grow. The opportunities include external financing for the renovation of units, the increase in the number of users demanding the service, and the development of new technologies for controlling activities. However, threats such as rising fuel prices and informal transportation must be adequately managed.

**Table 3: SWOT Matrix**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Presence of physical offices.	1. Poor internal communication.	1. External financing for unit renovation.	1. Increase in the price of fuel.
2. Operational and administrative personnel with valid documentation.	2. Poor publicity of the cooperative.	2. Increase in the number of users demanding the service.	Increase in informal transportation.
3. Staff willing to make changes and improvements.	3. Minimal teamwork.	3. Development of new technologies for the control of activities.	3. Delay in local economic development.
4. Semi-modern units.	4. No automation of processes.	4. Training agreements.	4. Increase in the cost of maintenance and spare parts for the units.
5. Efficient accounting management.	5. Lack of a philosophy in the cooperative.	5. Development of control methods for the route.	5. Increase in social insecurity.
6. Internal savings generated by members.	6. Obsolete activity management and control system.		6. Dissatisfaction on the part of users with respect to the attitude of drivers and assistants.

Table 3 shows the SWOT matrix, which highlighted several internal strengths of the cooperative, such as the presence of physical offices, trained personnel, semi-modern units, and efficient accounting administration. However, significant weaknesses were also identified, such as poor internal communication, poor publicity, and lack of automation in processes. External opportunities, such as financing for unit renovation and the development of new technologies, present a competitive advantage. Threats, including rising fuel prices and informal transportation, must be managed to avoid negative impacts.

Following the methodology, two types of surveys were carried out: the first was applied to a specific sample of 25 people who constitute the internal personnel of the company; the second was applied to 384 clients. The results obtained from the surveys indicate that the company does not have clearly established administrative processes, clear objectives, or an administrative structure such as a functions manual, organization chart, among other elements that are essential for good business management, which leads to shortcomings and poor positioning in the market. Therefore, these shortcomings are directly reflected in the satisfaction of internal and external customers, significantly influencing the development of the cooperative, since they are a key factor in maintaining a competitive advantage and achieving an excellent quality of service.

Survey tabulation and analysis

Below are the tables and graphs that correspond to the information collected in the surveys made to the Cooperative's personnel and customers. Each table of information was made with its respective graph to observe the tendency of the answers obtained in order to draw the right conclusions after analyzing the results.

**Survey applied to the personnel of the Interprovincial Transportation Cooperative "Trans Vencedores" (Cooperativa de Transportes Interprovincial "Trans Vencedores").**

**Table 3: Functions performed in the cooperative**

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Driver	13	52%
Controller	5	20%
Administrative	7	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 3 shows that the highest percentage, corresponding to 52% of the respondents, are drivers of the cooperated vehicles, 20% are drivers and 28% belong to the company's administrative personnel.

**Table 4: Vision and mission implemented**

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
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YES	21	84%
NO	4	16%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 4 explores that 84% of the respondents are aware of the implementation of mission and vision in the cooperative, while the remaining 16% are not aware of these elements, which evidences poor communication and socialization within the organization.

**Table 5: Rating of administrative management**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	0	0%
Very Good	12	48%
Good	9	36%
Malo	4	16%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 5 shows that 48% of the respondents consider that the administrative management of the last two years has been very good, while 36% rate it as good and 16% as bad, indicating an overall positive perception but with areas for improvement.

**Table 6: Presentation of report on goals reached**

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Always	6	8%
Almost always	10	40%
Sometimes	7	28%
Never	2	8%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 6 shows that 40% of respondents believe that the report of goals achieved is almost always shared, while 28% believe that it is sometimes shared and 24% indicate that the report is always shared. Eight percent believe that a goal report is never shared, suggesting areas for improvement in internal communication.

**Table 7: Communication between managers and members of the cooperative**

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Always	9	36%
Almost always	11	44%
Sometimes	5	20%
Never	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 7 shows that 44% of the respondents consider that the decisions made by the board are almost always communicated to all members of the cooperative, while 36% answered that they are always shared and 20% that they are sometimes made known, suggesting a mostly effective communication, but with areas for improvement.

**Table 8: Internal communication**

ALTERNATIVE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Excellent	1	4%
Very Good	7	28%
Good	15	60%
Mala	2	8%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 8 explores that 60% of the respondents consider that internal communication in the cooperative is good, 28% that it is very good, while 8% think it is bad and 4% rate it as excellent. This suggests that the majority of employees feel that internal communication could be improved.

**Table 9: Staff opinion**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	21	84%
No	4	16%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 9 shows that 84% of respondents believe that staff opinions are taken into account by the cooperative's management, while 16% do not. This suggests that, although mostly positive, the inclusion of staff opinions could be improved.

**Table 10: opinion of remuneration**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	0	0%
Very good	12	48%
Good	13	52%
Regular	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 10 shows that 52% of respondents consider that the remuneration received is good, while 48% rate it as very good, indicating a general satisfaction in this area.

**Table 11: Training to members and workers**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Always	0	0%

Almost always	8	32%
Sometimes	16	64%
Never	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 11 determines that 64% of the respondents consider that trainings are sometimes conducted, 32% that they are almost always conducted and 4% that they are never conducted, suggesting that there is room for improvement in the frequency of trainings.

**Table 12: Quality of Service**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	0	0%
Very Good	13	52%
Good	12	48%
Malo	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 12 shows that 52% of the respondents consider the service offered by the cooperative to be very good, while 48% consider it to be good, indicating an overall positive perception of the service.

**Survey applied to users and potential users of the Transport Cooperative "Trans Vencedores".**

**Table 13: Gender of Users**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Male	188	49%
Female	196	51%
<b>Total</b>	384	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 13 shows that 49% of the surveyed users are male, while 51% are female, indicating a slight female predominance among users.

**Table 14: Age of users**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 25	120	31.3%
25 - 32	149	38.8%
32 - 39	67	17.4%
39 - 46 and up	48	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	384	100%

Source: Survey applied

Table 14 explores that 38.8% of users are in the age range of 25 to 32 years, followed by 31.3% between 18 to 25 years, indicating that the majority of users are young adults.

**Table 15: Frequency of service use**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
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Always	96	25%
Almost always	174	45.3%
Sometimes	114	29.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 15 shows that 45.3% of the users use the service almost always, while 25% always use it, indicating a high frequency of use of the transportation service.

**Table 16: Quality of service**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	102	26.6%
Good	205	53.4%
Regular	65	16.9%
Malo	12	3.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 16 shows that 53.4% of users consider the service to be good, while 26.6% rate it as excellent, indicating a positive perception of the quality of service.

**Table 17: Attention of drivers and assistants**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	98	25.5%
Good	212	55.2%
Regular	64	16.7%
Malo	10	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 17 shows that 55.2% of users consider the service provided by drivers and assistants to be good, while 25.5% rate it as excellent, indicating a mostly positive perception of the service received.

**Table 18: Service deficiencies**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Slow service	136	35.4%
Unit cleaning	100	26%
Unreliable	56	14.6%
Others	92	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 18 shows that 35.4% of users consider that the service is slow, 26% that the cleanliness of the units is poor, and 14.6% that the units are unsafe, indicating key areas for service improvement.

**Table 19: There should be improvements in the service**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	309	80.5%
No	75	18.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 19 shows that 80.5% of users believe that the cooperative should improve the quality of the services it offers, while 19.5% believe that the service is excellent, suggesting a general perception of a need for improvement.

**Table 20: Unit comfort**

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	88	22.9%
Good	220	57.3%
Regular	62	16.1%
Malo	14	3.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey applied

Table 20 shows that 57.3% of users consider the comfort of the units to be good, while 22.9% rate it as excellent, indicating a mostly positive perception, but with room for improvement.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Cooperative has significant weaknesses in internal communication, publicity, teamwork and process automation. The lack of a clear organizational philosophy and an obsolete management and activity control system also represent important challenges that affect operational efficiency and staff and client satisfaction. Among the strengths highlighted are the presence of physical offices, operational staff with documents in order, staff readiness for changes and improvements, semi-modern units, and efficient accounting management. These strengths provide a solid foundation on which to build administrative improvements.

There are significant opportunities for the cooperative, such as external financing for the renovation of units, the increase in the number of users demanding the service, the development of new technologies for controlling activities, and training agreements. These opportunities can be used to boost growth and improve the cooperative's competitiveness. However, the cooperative faces important threats such as the increase in fuel prices, the increase in informal transportation, the delay in local economic development, the increase in the cost of maintenance and spare parts for the units, and

the growing social insecurity. These threats must be managed strategically to mitigate their negative impact on the organization.

Most staff feel that internal communication and feedback could be improved. Although remuneration is viewed positively, training is not perceived as frequent, indicating the need for a more robust and regular training program. On the other hand, users have a mostly positive perception of the service offered by the cooperative, although a significant portion considers that there are areas that need improvement, especially in the speed of service and the cleanliness of the units. The service provided by drivers and attendants is well valued, but there is always room for improvement in the quality of service.

It is essential to design and implement a management strengthening plan that addresses identified weaknesses, capitalizes on strengths and opportunities, and mitigates threats. This plan should include strategies to improve internal communication, increase the frequency and quality of training, modernize management and activity control systems, and develop a clear and shared organizational philosophy. In summary, the Cooperativa de Transporte Interprovincial "Transvencedores" has significant potential to improve its operational efficiency and user satisfaction through a strategic approach to administration and organizational management. The implementation of an administrative strengthening plan based on the findings of this study will allow the cooperative to consolidate its position in the market and offer a high quality service, benefiting both its employees and its users.

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