

Study Guide for Cooperative Wisdom:

Bringing People Together When Things Fall Apart

Chapter 1 – Why Being Good is not Enough

1. The authors believe cooperation is what most people do most of the time. In two minutes, list the many ways in which you benefit from cooperation.
2. The authors identify three problems that contribute to the breakdown of cooperation. Can you name all three? Can you find examples in your own life?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of specialization?
4. Describe a situation in which a cooperative project failed because of scale. Did problems occur because the project was too big or too small?
5. What do the authors mean by outliers? Are there situations that make you feel like an outlier? Are you aware of ways in which environments that work well for you create disadvantages for others?

Chapter 2 – Proactive Compassion: Anticipating and Responding to Vulnerability

1. How does Proactive Compassion differ from traditional ideas of compassion?
2. What is your area of specialization? How have you used your unique perspective to prevent harms for others? How might you do this in the future?
3. How does change make people vulnerable? Think of specific examples of people who are distressed by change in your family, your school or workplace, your larger community.
4. How does specialization create gaps in accountability? What do the authors mean by response ability?
5. Can you recall a time when you were able to respond constructively to a problem even though you weren't responsible for causing it?

Chapter 3 – Deep Discernment: Discovering Bedrock Values

1. The authors argue that conflict usually occurs because people feel that something they value is threatened. People dig in because they have to defend what matters to them. Do you agree?
2. Think about a conflict that makes you truly angry. Examine your feelings. What is really at risk for you? Why do you care so much? Try to articulate what matters to you as clearly as you can.
3. Think of a product or policy that has been hugely successful and widely adopted. What unintended consequences did its popularity cause?
4. The authors contend that being open to multiple points of view strengthens cooperative efforts. Can you remember a problematic situation that was resolved because different people with different expertise were able to share their insights?

Chapter 4 – Intentional Imagination: Expanding What’s Possible

1. Think of a recent situation in which you’ve said “It is what it is.” What were you talking about? A natural law or a social configuration? If people created the problematic environment, how can people change it?
2. What are your favorite strategies for avoiding waste of known resources—time, food, attention, energy, money? Do you have opportunities to share these strategies with other people?
3. What do the authors mean by “concealed” resources? Can you provide an example from your own experience?
4. Give an example of how reading this chapter will change your approach a recurring issue in your life.

Chapter 5 – Inclusive Integrity: Reworking Cooperation So Everyone Can Thrive

1. Why do the authors believe integrity must be inclusive?
2. People become experts by becoming very knowledgeable about particular environments. How does change challenge expertise? What can specialists do to strengthen cooperative systems despite change?

3. Apply the river analogy used by the authors to a social system that is important to you—maybe your family or your workplace. How can you strengthen this system by considering harms that might occur at the margins, downstream or because of the speed of change?
4. Why is it important to think of every plan as an hypothesis?

Chapter 6 – Creative Courage: Embracing the Risks of Engagement

1. The authors talk about the experiences of predators, victims and bystanders. Remember a time when you were in each of these roles. What risks could you have taken to restore cooperation?
2. Think about a situation in which cooperation failed to create the benefits you had anticipated. How did you respond? What were the opportunities for creative courage?
3. Do you know a person or group that consistently takes more than their share of the benefits created by cooperation? How can you make them aware of harms that are genuine even if they are unintended? How can you enlist their help in making benefits more balanced?
4. What is one step you can take today to strengthen the cooperative systems around you?

Chapter 7 – The Social Virtues in Action

1. Think about an apparently intractable conflict in your own life or in the public sphere. Which of the social virtues gives you a way in.
2. The social virtues are not static. Please join the conversation about how they are operating and evolving in the world by following us on Facebook.