

Team Cohesion for Operational Performance of Co-operative Enterprise Members in South Africa

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Abstract:

Co-operative enterprises have been able to create employment potential, thus improving the economic lives of many people. Despite South African government support, many co-operatives have closed down. However, the government continues to seek ways to improve their performance. It has thus been established that co-operative members lack interpersonal connections and teamwork when engaged on their operational processes. The lack of such a bond affects effective participation in their businesses aimed at accomplishing their set goals. Hence, this study examines the influence of team cohesion on the operational performance of co-operative members in South Africa. Study objectives were achieved by examining production and related experiences of co-operative members. It assessed if team cohesion among team members is responsible for their company's operational performance. The study was quantitative in design. The primary data was collected from 136 co-operative members whose businesses operate within uThukela Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal (in South Africa), using a structured questionnaire. Data was analysed using descriptive and one-sample statistics.

The results indicates that team cohesion influences the operational performance of co-operative members in South Africa. Co-operative performance is thus enhanced by team cohesiveness. The original contribution of this study is its value in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of team cohesion on co-operatives in South Africa.

Keywords: co-operative enterprises, operational performance, team cohesion, teamwork, South Africa

Introduction

Co-operatives are enterprises that operates in both the industrialised and developing countries (Ravensburg, 2011). At the global level there are about three million co-operatives, providing employment to more than 280 million people (Ntirenganya, 2019). The structures of co-operatives allow communities to combine their resources and solve poverty-related problems.

According to Doyle (2017), co-operatives contribute to the solving of the South African socio-economic challenges, high unemployment rate and poverty and inequality. The South African government has recognised the co-operatives as an instrument to facilitate black economic empowerment. In addition, promoting co-operatives is one of the main programme components of the South African Government's Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) strategy. Co-operatives have played a key role in the South African economy (Vellem, 2013). The benefits and advantages extend to the users as well as the communities in which they operate. These benefits may be quantified in terms of employment creation, income generation and output growth.

Mbohwa (2016) defines a co-operative enterprise as an entity composed of a group who work as a team. Xaxx (2017) indicates that team cohesion and co-operation improve the operational performance of co-operatives. If employees are working separately and unaware of each other's tasks, they could be unknowingly duplicating their activities (Ntirenganya, 2019). In addition, by delegating tasks based on abilities and having each member of a team focused on accomplishing certain aspects of a project, operational performance targets can be achieved using far less time and energy than if each of the team members was working alone. Hence, this study evaluates the influence of team cohesion on operational performance of co-operative enterprises in South Africa. It is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: Does team cohesion have the ability to improve the operational performance of co-operative enterprises in South Africa?
- RQ2: Do co-operative members have a shared understanding of how the team operates?

A substantial amount of South African government resources have been spent on the promotion of co-operatives in the past 15 years at the three spheres of government (Naidoo & Urban, 2012). The aim is to enhance economic development, job creation and reduce poverty. However, there is little evidence of their survival and employment creation (Amene, 2017). The South African co-operatives have seen a failure rate of approximately 88 per cent each year (NCOP, 2010). The baseline study commissioned by the DTI (2012) highlights that only 2 644 of 22 030 co-operatives could be verified as being in operation, representing a mere 12 per cent survival rate of co-operatives in South Africa. Consequently, this study assesses the influence of team cohesion as an approach for operational performance on co-operative members in South Africa.

There are a number of studies (Bhasin, 2017; Mdamba, 2014; Okem, 2016; Woodcock, 2016) that have assessed the effectiveness of teamwork and team cohesion in various organisations around the world. It has thus been observed that there is an overlap when these two concepts are described (Bhasin, 2017; Okem, 2016; Kumari 2015) in which teamwork enhances team cohesion. For this study, the concept of team cohesion will be discussed interchangeably with teamwork. Hence, the rest of the study discusses the literature review, methodology, study results, discussion, the implications of results for policy and practice, study limitations, as well as the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides an overview of teamwork as a driver that enhances operational performance, team measures that enhance performance, as well as co-operative member participation for operational performance.

Overview of team cohesion as a driver that enhances operational performance

In the business world, the term “team” describes a group of employees who work together on a certain task (Newell, 2017). According to Salas (2014), teams are a different set of two or more individuals who interact dynamically, interdependently and adaptively towards a common objective. Thus, team cohesion involves the performance of specific tasks that team members need to accomplish. Bhasin (2017) describe team cohesion as behaviour that facilitates effective team member interaction. It is a description of how work is organised. Salas (2014) indicates that a team is subject to local definition and, hence, must be defined in relation to the working context. Thus, the interpersonal competency needed to participate in a team depends on the work of the organisation. Mdamba (2014) defines teamwork as a group of two or more individuals who work together to accomplish a collective goal through mutual interdependence. It implies that individuals work in a co-operative setting, in the interests of achieving a collective goal by sharing knowledge or skills, whilst being flexible in serving multiple roles within the organisation. Okem (2016) similarly defines teamwork as a group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. According to West (2012), a simple way to explain teamwork or team cohesion is in terms of their outcomes. This elaborates that teamwork and team cohesion occur when people have strong relationships where they work together well so that they succeed at their tasks. They involves helpful, supportive and integrative actions that in turn help teams to succeed at tasks and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Mathieu (2008) stresses that, even with experience of the task, a team will fail if the members are unable to share knowledge and trust one another. However, team cohesion is essential for a successful co-operative performance.

The strength of the bond between members and their co-operative is the most important factor in co-operatives (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016). Thus, the lack of members’ support is one weakness that can delay co-operative growth. Kumari (2015) echoed that the real strength of any co-operative entity is its inner strength that originates from team cohesion and the commitment of members. The co-operative leaders are responsible for improving skills and the organisational commitment for effective teamwork and team cohesion, which in turn plays a significant role in improving the overall performance. Mbaraka (2017) indicates that organisations worldwide have various ways of enhancing their employees’ operational performance. However, these vary from one organisation to another, depending on the actual functions of each organisation and culture embraced therein. Opiyo (2010) contends that organisations that perform poorly had implemented the wrong management strategies to foster team performance, such as a lack of the proper use of team cohesion.

According to Bhasin (2017), team cohesiveness amongst co-operative members is always valuable. It increases employee performance and organisational output. In addition, he

identifies five advantages for team cohesiveness. These include the reduction of unproductive competition as it encourages employees to work together for the benefit of the organisation, improves knowledge sharing, and fosters good communication. In addition, it facilitates the achievement of organisational goals (thus, everyone gets on board and strives towards the common goal), as well as establishing trust (that is, working in a team builds confidence in any setting and creates strong relationships amongst employees).

Kwasira (2013) indicate that operational performance can be improved by the practise of teamwork, thus enhancing cohesion. He asserts that there are a number of factors constituting an effective and efficient team. A team must have a clear purpose. This means that the vision, mission and goals of the team must be clearly defined and shared by all members of the team. Sharing outlines the purpose of the team, which is translated into a plan of action. Acharya (2015) indicates teamwork as a tool that enhances team cohesion fits within a collectivist culture in which employees are committed to one another, wherein emphasis is placed upon co-operative rather than competitive relationships. Mdamba (2014) adds that if one takes the Japanese model as the ideal, then this collectivism, commitment and co-operation needs to be accompanied by long-term employment and feelings of security engendered, seniority-based promotion and team-based reward policies. In addition, he emphasises that if the team is to be granted autonomy in certain areas of decision-making, then the cultural profile should encompass values and attitudes on the part of both management and employees.

Luca (2002) presented the attributes essential for positive team cohesiveness. These include:

- *Commitment to team success and shared goals:* Team members are committed to the success of the team and their shared goals for the project. Successful teams are motivated and engaged;
- *Interdependence:* Team members need to create an environment where, together, they contribute far more than they do as individuals;
- *Interpersonal skills:* This includes the ability to discuss issues openly with team members honestly, being trustworthy, supportive and showing respect, as well as commitment to the team and its individuals. Fostering a caring work environment is important, including the ability to work effectively with other team members;
- *Open communication and positive feedback:* Actively listening to the concerns and needs of team members and valuing their contribution. Team members should be willing to give and receive constructive criticism and provide authentic feedback;
- *Appropriate team composition:* This is essential in the creation of a successful team. Team members need to be fully aware of their specific team role and understand what is expected of them in terms of their contribution to the team and the project; and
- *Commitment to team processes, leadership and accountability:* Team members need to be accountable for their contribution to the team and the project. They need to be aware of team processes, best practice and new ideas. Effective leadership is essential for team success, including shared decision-making and problem solving.

Mdamba (2014) argues that teams are the key component of improved productivity and quality of co-operative enterprises. They are critical in reducing absenteeism, increasing innovation and improving organisational adaptability.

Team measures that enhance performance

In order to maximise performance of co-operatives, Mbaraka (2017) suggests that all employees who belong to a team be trained, ensuring that they understand and concur on the benefits of teamwork on quality and efficiency. Team members are individuals with diverse emotional needs. This must be known and individual differences understood in order to create teams that are able to utilise them as strengths and not weaknesses. Brannick, Salas and Prince (2009) suggest that a team of individuals should be observed and the work of the team rated. They elaborate that individuals should be motivated and have the skills necessary to use measurement effectively. However, the successful performance of teams includes communication amongst several members who must work as a team. In addition, a key feature of teams is that members must manage their decisions and activities by sharing information and resources to achieve shared goals. Kloefkom (2016) recommends that for co-operatives to improve operational performance they should have a common purpose (that is, team working together towards the same goal, understands the goal and makes sure that it is challenging); clear (an overall skill set for a team to accomplish the work; mutual accountability (responsibility to each other, not just to a manager or leader); enabling structure (that is, team systems, roles and norms are firmly set in place, organised and functional); and inspiring leader (that is, a manager to encourage staff development, encouraging open communication, delegation and give the team credit where due).

Co-operative member participation for operational performance

Co-operative members' participation in the affairs of their enterprise increases the feeling of ownership and responsibility of operational success (United States Department of Agriculture, 2016). However, members themselves must make an effort to participate. According to Ngwamba (2016), membership participation, availability of inputs such as capital, land, skilled labour, less rigid state policy and regulatory frameworks can add to the success or failure of co-operatives' operational performances. Moreover, effectiveness in the operations of co-operatives relies on numerous factors, which involve the availability of co-operative criteria such as regular communication amongst the elected operational structures through performance appraisal meetings and workshops. These factors have direct implications for co-operative operations, hence a lack of each factor might result in destruction in the operational process, leading to the co-operative being unsuccessful. Ramezani (2008) identified that active member participation in the administration of co-operatives is a critical factor influencing the performance of co-operatives. Acharya (2015) argues that the increased participation of co-operative members results in the potential of conflict amongst members. These conflicts have the potential to influence the success of co-operative operations". However, Mahazril (2012) argues that active member participation helps management in carrying out their responsibilities, since members' involvement maintains the direction of the co-operative towards enhancing performance. Baruch (2015) argues that "when a new project team is established, members bring their personal traits and previous experiences, as well as the tendency to act in different ways at different moments, depending on the effects of other members' interactions. However, Solansky (2011) believes that not all responsibilities need the abilities of multiple team members. The effective work of a team can be noticed when

identification is present. Through identification, group members are motivated to contribute to the group's success as this increases the feelings of pride and respect (Mdamba, 2014). Some teams with highly skilled individuals fail because they do not develop into a unified unit. Eizen and Desivilya (2006) argue that a critical distinction between individual-oriented work and teams is the extent to which individual members identify with their teams.

However, Woodcock (2016) argues that there is still a need for a single person who is able to consolidate ideas, who believes that innovation is possible and who has the motivation to persist until the job is done. Thus, there is usually a key entrepreneur in any co-operative (Mbaraka, 2017). This then raises the question of whether the entrepreneurial team is a genuine team. The entrepreneur usually specialises in taking critical decisions about the management of scarce resources (Mbohwa, 2016). Hence, an entrepreneur is a person, not a team, since only individuals can make decisions. Newell (2017) agrees that within a co-operative enterprise, there will be a principal member who creates the vision and gathers others to share that dream. However, many organisations start by single entrepreneurs as this becomes the simplest way to proceed. However, this does not proclaim the necessity to agree with other team members about time, money, power or future direction. However, this study assesses the influence of team cohesion on the operational performance of co-operative enterprises in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research will be discussed under the following headings, namely: the target population, the municipalities under which co-operatives that participated in the study were operating, sample size, data collection, as well as the measurement and analysis.

Target population

The target population refers to all the participants who meet the particular criteria specified for a research investigation (Welman, Kruger & Mitchel, 2009). The target population in this study constituted 250 co-operative enterprises within uThukela Municipality (DTI, 2012). For this study, each co-operative was represented by one member.

The municipalities under which co-operatives were located

The study was conducted in the uThukela Municipality, in the KwaZulu-Natal Province (in South Africa). The uThukela Municipality is one of the ten municipalities in the province. The following Table 1 presents the spread of co-operatives in different local municipalities of the district.

Table 1: co-operatives in different municipalities of the uThukela Municipality

No	Local Municipality	Number of co-operatives	Percentage of the total
1.	Alfred Duma Local Municipality	115	46
2.	Inkosi Langalibalele Local Municipality	87	35
3.	Okhahlamba Local Municipality	48	19
Total		250	100

Source: Author's own analysis

Table 1 shows that Alfred Duma Local Municipality had a larger number (at 46 per cent) of the co-operatives whilst Okhahlamba Local Municipality had the least number of co-operatives at 19 per cent.

Sample size

From a total of 250 co-operatives, 145 were randomly selected for participation. However, 136 co-operatives participated. Recruitment of co-operatives was undertaken with the aim of ensuring a representative spread of co-operatives in various local municipalities of the district.

Data collection

A self-administered questionnaire was used in this study. According to Newell (2017), self-administered questionnaires are useful for collecting data from a large number of participants, particularly when respondents are dispersed over a wide geographic area. The distribution and retrieval of questionnaires was done from 145 randomly selected co-operatives. However, a total of 136 questionnaires were retrieved through hand collection and emails from members of co-operatives. A total of 136 questionnaires were returned, representing a 94 per cent response rate, considered high compared with the norm for surveys responses (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The main reason for this high response rate was the invitation letter sent to the co-operatives within the uThukela Municipality.

Measurement and analysis

In line with research framework, the study measured six variables using the questionnaire. It employed a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The variables (Doyle, 2017; Xaxx, 2017; Mbaraka, 2017; Newell, 2017; Opiyo, 2010) include: co-operative performance is enhanced by team cohesiveness, members of the co-operative provide input into operational challenges of the enterprise, co-operative team members are dependent on each other for the performance of the enterprise, co-operative team members have a shared understanding on how the team operates, and co-operative members resolve their conflicts for operational performance, even if conflicts become personal.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 was used to do the data analysis. Both the descriptive and one-sample tests were used to analyse the study objectives.

STUDY RESULTS

Descriptive analysis for team cohesion as a driver for co-operative performance

The following Table 2 presents percentage responses regarding the influence of team cohesion on the operational performance of co-operatives.

Table 2: influence of team cohesion on the operational performance of co-operatives

Team cohesion on operational performance	Percentage response accepting the influence of team cohesion on operational performance
Co-operative performance is enhanced by team cohesiveness	96.3
Members of the co-operative provide input into operational challenges of the enterprise	94.9
Co-operative team members are dependent on each other for the performance of the enterprise	75.6
Co-operative team members have a shared understanding of how the team operates	91.2
Co-operative members resolve their conflicts for operational performance, even if conflicts become personal	55.6

Source: Author's own analysis

The co-operative members strongly agreed that team cohesion influences the operational performance of co-operatives in South Africa. Critical factors as presented in Table 2 include: employees have competencies relevant to their field of work at 85.9 per cent; employees possess technical competencies relevant to the enterprise's production process at 94.8 per cent; technical competencies contribute to the awareness of operational processes of the co-operative at 65.9 per cent; and technical competencies contribute to the operational success of a co-operative at 95.6 per cent. These factors have bigger percentages above 50 per cent. The results are supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (2016) which indicates that the strength of the bond between members and their co-operative is the most important factor in co-operatives. Thus, the lack of members' support is one weakness that can delay co-operative growth.

One-sample tests for team cohesion as a driver for co-operative performance

The one-sample tests were used to test the differences or agreements between genders, thus determining whether there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchel (2009), one-sample tests determine whether a population mean is significantly different from the hypothesised value. The following Table 3 presents technical competencies test results for technical competencies on operations performance for the co-operatives.

Table3: one-sample test for team cohesion as a driver for co-operative performance

Team cohesion variables for operational performance					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
1.0 Co-operative performance is enhanced by team cohesiveness	-26.205	135	0.000	-1.441	-1.55	-1.33
2.0 Members of the co-operative provide input into operational challenges of the enterprise	-24.345	134	0.000	-1.326	-1.43	-1.22
3.0 Co-operative team members are dependent on each other for the performance of the enterprise	-13.685	134	0.000	-1.022	-1.17	-0.87
4.0 Co-operative team members have a shared understanding of how the team operates	-20.416	134	0.000	-1.237	-1.36	-1.12
5.0 Co-operative members resolve their conflicts for the improvement of operational performance, even if conflicts become personal	-9.101	134	0.000	-0.704	-0.86	-0.55

Source: Author's own analysis

The results in Table 3 show that there is statistical significant agreement between different genders of the co-operatives on the influence of team cohesion and operational performance. These include:

- co-operative performance is enhanced by the use of teamwork at p-value of 0.000 [t(135) = -26.205, p<0.05],
- the members of the co-operative provide input into the operational issues of the enterprise at p-value of 0.000 [t(134) = -24.345, p<0.05],
- co-operative team members are dependent on each other for the performance of the enterprise at p-value of 0.000 [t(134) = - 7.920, p<0.05],
- co-operative team members have a shared understanding of how the team operates at p-value of 0.000 [t(134) = -20.416, p<0.05], and
- co-operative members' resolve their conflicts, even when the conflicts become personal at p-value of 0.000 [t(134) = -9.101, p<0.05].

The above analysis shows that p-values are below the critical value of 0.05 level at the 5 per cent level of significance. The results indicates that team cohesion influences operational performance of co-operatives in South Africa. According to Opiyo (2010), organisations should implement those management strategies that foster team cohesion. Barreira (2005) indicates that technical and industry-specific competencies should receive attention in co-operative formation aimed at improving team cohesion.

DISCUSSION

The study investigates the influence of team cohesion on operational performance in co-operative enterprises in South Africa. It examined the production and related experiences of the co-operative members. Descriptive and one-sample tests were used to analyse data. The study indicates team cohesion amongst members of the co-operatives influence the operational performance of the co-operative enterprises in South Africa. Mbaraka (2017) maintains that when teamwork is well practised, the result improved performance, productivity and morale, enhanced cohesion, as well as providing a positive attitude towards work. Woodcock (2016) emphasises that a team development process is crucial when co-operatives are working towards building effective teams within their enterprises. He identifies clear targets and agreed goals, openness and trust, co-operation, sound working and decision-making procedures, training in leadership and management, individual development plans, as well as sound inter-group relations as contributing towards team cohesion within co-operative enterprises in South Africa.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The South African Small Business Development Department and DTI should revise co-operative enterprise development strategies, policies and practices that help to achieve co-operative business goals (Twalo, 2012). This must be based on an understanding of the economic factors relating to team cohesion of co-operative members for the improvement in operational performance in South Africa (Bhasin, 2017). Besides the achievement of study objectives, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The real strength of any co-operative entity is its inner strength that originates from teamwork and the commitment of members (Kumari, 2015)
2. Co-operative members rely on each other for the performance of their co-operative. Furthermore, he states that members have to be supportive of each other to accomplish co-operatives objectives (West, 2012).
3. The successful performance of teams includes communication amongst several members who must work as a team (Brannick, et al., 2009)
4. The vision, mission and goals of the team must be clearly defined and shared by all members of the team (Kwasira, 2013).

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study was limited to co-operative enterprises located within the uThukela Municipality. It was conducted in the three local municipalities of the uThukela Municipality. As there are

more than 8 073 co-operative enterprises in South Africa (DTI, 2012), the results cannot be extrapolated to other co-operative enterprises.

CONCLUSION

The lack of team cohesion within co-operative members and employees weakens the chances of co-operative enterprise success. According to Brodie (2009), it is essential for members of a co-operative to be confident that other members perform their tasks to achieve the goals of the business. Building confidence takes time, commitment and trust. Mbaraka (2017) insists that all members and employees of the co-operative be trained, ensuring that they understand and concur with the benefits for team cohesion.

FUTURE RESEARCH REQUIRED

During the course of this study, issues relating to the long-term survival of co-operative enterprises resulting from team cohesion were not covered. This includes the influence of team cohesion in other provinces of South Africa. It is recommended that future research should examine impact of team cohesion, through both the quantitative and qualitative design, in depth.

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