

Member Commitment in Olive Oil Co-operatives: Cause and Consequences

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Commitment has an important place in organisational behaviour literature due to the consequences for business efficiency. In this paper we study co-operatives that produce olive oil and the commitment characteristics of their members. Based on the Meyer and Allen (1991) and Sharma and Irving (2005) models, our objective is to analyse the commitment shown by members of olive oil co-operatives, the attitudes behind each type of commitment, and the consequences of the behaviour shown by members. Our work is motivated by the lack of studies on these types of democratically governed organisations. We use a qualitative methodology to make an empirical study through interviews with members of olive oil co-operatives. In the study we show the differing perspectives of members in relation with their continuance in the co-operative, and we analyse the commitment displayed by these members. We present a commitment model for co-operatives that could be a guide for future research on co-operatives. These results are an initial effort to understand the consequences of the commitment shown by co-operative members.

Introduction

The concept of commitment has received a considerable attention in the literature on organisational behaviour (McGee & Ford, 1987; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Reichers, 1985; Morrow, 1983). Having reviewed the literature, Meyer & Herscovitch (2001) proposed a concept of commitment as a force experienced in a frame of mind or psychological state that compels an individual toward a course of action relevant to one or more targets. Scholars distinguish between the various targets (*foci*) and mind-sets (*bases*) of commitment (Becker, 1992). *Foci* are the particular entities, such as individuals and groups, to which an individual is attached (Becker, 1992; Reichers, 1985); while *bases* are the motives that engender attachment (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Becker, 1992). Meyer & Herscovitch (2001) go further with their general model of commitment in the workplace and identify three bases of commitment rooted in the mindsets of desire, obligation, and opportunity cost.

While important advances are being made in terms of distinguishing the different mind-sets that lead to commitment, other areas appear to resist progress. Sharma & Irving (2005) analyse the bases of family-business successor commitment and draw attention to the gap in our understanding of the underlying motives that lead to each type of commitment. Reichers (1985, p469) feels that we should deepen our knowledge of commitment by gaining an understanding of the point of view of the committed person – by asking the subjects themselves to explain their own experience in terms of their attachment to the organisation.

Meyer & Herscovich (2001, p309) believe that we will be in a better position to predict behaviour when we are aware of the object of commitment. Moreover, these authors point out the need to pay attention to the nature of the organisation: as this is the focus of the individual's commitment.

This paper attempts to analyse the unique features of the commitment displayed by members within agricultural co-operatives. These organisations are formed by a union of farmers who come together to achieve common objectives that they would be unable to achieve efficiently if they worked separately. All members within these organisations have decision-making powers that enable them to establish the objectives of the group. We focus our attention on olive-oil co-operatives in Andalusia (a region in southern Spain) in order to gain an awareness of the perception of member commitment. These co-operatives transform the olives grown by the members into olive oil and also market the product. Most of these co-operatives have been running in a stable fashion for more than five decades (Ceña et al, 1983; Domingo & De Loma-Ossorio, 1991; Morales et al, 2003).

Research aimed at attempting to establish the position of members within co-operatives suggests that the underlying mechanisms in the more successful co-operatives are related to the level of loyalty and commitment that members display towards their organisation (Bruque et al, 2002). Furthermore, from another perspective, members who are committed to their co-operatives achieve objectives that they would be unable to achieve if acting separately.

Despite recognition of the importance of the

concept, there has been no systematic research into commitment within these organisations. Grosskopf, et al (2009), points out that “the value of membership is a central issue in the current discussion on the perspectives of co-operatives in the future” and show the differences with other organisations. Literature on the subject views a lack of commitment as a result of a lack of participation, or a lack of interest and an individualistic spirit, but fails to explain potential differences in the nature or intensity of this lack of commitment. At this point certain questions need to be posed: do members forming part of a co-operative display the same levels of commitment? If there are differences, what are the bases that will enable us to identify the nature and scope of commitment? What types of behaviour and outcomes do we associate with different levels of commitment?

These questions have been answered by analysing remarks made by members of an olive oil co-operative. This empirical evidence has enabled us to formulate a group of proposals that help us understand the attitudes that ensure that members of an olive oil co-operative remain in the co-operative and the consequences derived from their commitment.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section we provide details of the theoretical considerations found in the literature that refer to the different bases of commitment and the underlying attitudes in each case. Thereafter, we provide the results of our empirical study, set out a series of proposals, and present a commitment model for the co-operatives that are the object of our study. The research and practical implications of these ideas are discussed in the last section.

Theoretical Framework: Organisational Commitment

It is widely accepted that employee commitment within organisations may take different forms and that an awareness of these differences enables researchers to make more accurate predictions regarding the impact of commitment on behaviour (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

In their model of organisational commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) present the concept of commitment as a psychological state that increases the probability that an employee will remain within an organisation. They describe different types of commitment: *affective commitment* (the desire to remain within an

organisation); *normative commitment* (perception of an obligation to remain); and *continuance commitment* (costs envisaged as a result of abandoning an organisation), thereby identifying the different attitudes reflected in each of these levels.

Affective commitment: this refers to the degree of emotional attachment to and identification with the organisation. Members with a high sense of affective commitment remain members because they believe in the organisation. They accept and enthusiastically reaffirm the objectives of the organisation and display a strong desire to contribute towards the attainment of these objectives. They feel that the organisation’s objectives are in close alignment with their own; and that their own objectives are more easily attained via the organisation.

Normative commitment: this is based on an individual’s sense of ‘duty’ when following a course of action that relates to one or more objectives. An individual with high levels of normative commitment will feel obliged to remain within the organisation, becoming involved in the organisation to a greater or lesser extent.

Continuance commitment: this is based on the individual’s awareness of the costs associated with abandoning the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991) accompanied by a mindset that seeks to avoid these costs.

Consensus does not exist about whether continuance commitment is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. Several authors, such as McGee and Ford (1987) and Meyer, Allen and Gellatly (1990), have provided evidence to distinguish two dimensions within continuance commitment. The first, an imperative commitment, relates to commitment based on the recognition that there are scarce opportunities apart from those offered by the organisation; the second, a calculative commitment, relates to commitment based on the personal sacrifice involved in leaving the organisation.

Attention should also be paid to the nature of an organisation as a coalition or political body (Cyert & March, 1963; March & Simon, 1958) wherein the members may form a part of the dominant coalition that contributes to and helps define organisational efficiency. According to Reichers (1985, p469), organisational commitment involves a series of multiple commitments by the various groups that make up the organisation. When we understand the nature of member commitment we will have a

better understanding of organisational commitment.

In response to such a call, Sharma and Irving (2005) focus on the family firm as one particular form of business organisation. In particular, they seek to understand the attitudes that compel next-generation members of family-owned businesses to pursue a career in their family firms. They identify four different mind-sets that drive the commitment of successors. They proposed a model outlining the antecedents and consequences of the different bases of successor commitment. They also proposed that, although the different bases of commitment result in similar commitment-focal behavioural relations, these produce varying levels of discretionary behaviour, which in turn, lead to varying levels of effectiveness and performance.

Based on the Sharma and Irving (2005, p20) model we will analyse forms of commitment among the members of olive oil co-operatives, the attitudes underlying each type of commitment, and the behavioural consequences.

Methodology

The nature of our approach has prompted us to use qualitative methodology in order to understand the way in which commitment influences behaviour within an organisation. We have used several sources that enable us to consider alternative perspectives or explanations that capture the heterogeneity and scope of the concept of commitment.

Our objective involves identifying and interpreting the behaviour of the members and their commitment to the co-operative to which they belong. Moreover, according to Alonso (1998, p53), the qualitative approach is fundamentally a motivational approach (that is, an approach that seeks to explain the actions of the agents) referring to the history of the subjects as members of a collective. This methodology enables us to employ interpretative techniques to investigate, identify, and understand a specific phenomenon, such as member commitment. Furthermore, this methodology is more focused on determining the meaning of this phenomenon rather than its quantification.

To gather information we used in-depth interviews. We carried out a series of face-to-face meetings with the informants in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives in

relation to their lives, experiences, and circumstances – as expressed in their own words. The analysis units in this case are members of olive-oil co-operatives in Andalusia. It was difficult to define the number of members to be interviewed beforehand as we hoped to saturate possible relationships with the object of the analysis. Saturation is one of the key validation criteria of qualitative research (Mucchielli, 1991, p112). Thus, we sought a population with a high social heterogeneity in terms of the following considerations: property, age, commitment to the activity, training, education and place of residence. In the end, 181 interviews were conducted.

Interviews were carried out in three phases: the first phase extended between November 2005 and January 2006; the second, between August and December 2006; and the third, between May and August 2008. The interviews took place in the co-operatives, a setting that afforded privacy, allowed for uninterrupted conversation, and where the members felt at ease.

The guide employed to conduct the interviews contained the topics and sub-topics that we wished to cover, in accordance with the objectives of our research. The guide was a script outline wherein the points to be discussed were specified as the field work developed.

Mind-Sets that Reflect the Different Forms of Commitment

Taking the model of Meyer and Allen (1991) as a starting point, we analysed the opinions of the members in relation to their level of involvement in the organisation in order to establish different the forms of conceiving their permanency.

Affective commitment: Members show an affective commitment as they value the benefits that the co-operative offers. They express a mind-set of desire, hoping to attain the objective and contribute to the attainment of the objective to the best of their ability. Members are convinced that the objectives of the co-operative are the same as those of the members, wherein collective benefit is sought via the union of small farmers. They want and value the egalitarian implementation of better services for each and every co-operative member. Grosskopf, et al (2009) affirm that “members are interested in intensifying their relations to their co-operative society, if the measures taken to bring about active membership are accepted by the

members, because they see them as beneficial for themselves”.

The members affirm ‘belief in the co-operative’, which means accepting that it is an organisation made up of individual farmers, who are therefore also the suppliers of the produce, and who unite in the face of the economic necessity of processing and/or marketing the produce of their farms in order to achieve better results and better services in accordance with the needs of each member. A belief in co-operativism means trusting that the profits will be divided in proportion to the contribution made by each member, and believing that members will democratically participate. There is a perception of alignment between organisational and individual goals. Such alignment leads to the belief that the objectives of the member can be attained within the context of the organisation.

This type of commitment enables members to believe that the co-operative will spare no effort to increase member earnings, and will therefore meet member expectations. The organisation can be described as ‘psychologically comfortable’ as it treats members fairly and increases its competitiveness via the incorporation of many small farmers.

Normative commitment: As Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) point out, it is difficult to distinguish between affective and normative forms of commitment. It is impossible to feel a strong sense of obligation towards an organisation without also possessing or developing positive emotional feelings towards this organisation. Nevertheless, the close relationship between members within olive oil co-operatives and their organisations creates a context wherein we are able to distinguish between two types of commitment. Affective commitment is motivated by a desire to contribute towards or adopt a focal behaviour; while the main motivating agent underlying normative commitment is a sense of obligation or a sense of duty that implies certain behaviour. Members are individuals who have accepted the task of managing the co-operative as they feel it is their duty to carry out this task within the organisations as a result of their background and situation. We, as well as Grosskopf et al (2009), point out that certain members also feel a sense of obligation because they inherited the farm from their family, and just as they feel that it is their duty to improve this farm¹, they also feel a

sense of obligation in terms of the co-operative because it defends their interests and has done so for many years. As a result of their socialisation these individuals have internalised a series of norms in terms of behaviour within the co-operative. Moreover, they receive a share of earnings and experience has shown that their organisation needs them as much as they need it.

Continuance commitment: The differences in the case of co-operatives are very subtle, but two dimensions of continuance commitment, as proposed by Meyer and Herscovitch (2001), exist. Members state that failure to belong to the co-operative would imply decreased opportunities because greater profits are available through the co-operatives. Olive oil co-operatives were established, as we have indicated, to provide a service to small farmers who had limited power within the market when attempting to negotiate the sale of their produce. Their offer is unified through the co-operatives and members were able to obtain better prices for their produce. By forming part of a larger organisation, members are able to obtain better services, and because they had more negotiating power they were more likely to receive fairer treatment. All of this leads to cost reductions, and the profits that would have been taken by a third-party during a transaction are divided proportionally among the members.

In this sense, the primary mind-set that guides the behaviour of many members, irrespective of the degree to which they believe in co-operativism or in the co-operative (affective commitment) involves a feeling of ‘having to’ join the co-operative as this option provides them with more profit. Members who feel that failure to belong to the co-operative implies a high cost in terms of lost opportunities, investments, and asset loss, are described as having a calculative commitment.

The imperative commitment is based on the perception that this option is the only option, or at least ‘the best of a bad bunch’. In other cases, we encounter the view that there is no other alternative, or that other options would lead to the member being deceived². Members with a high level of imperative commitment feel that they have no choice other than to be members of the co-operative. The mind-set in this case involves the perceived need to remain in the organisation.

We conclude that member commitment

takes various forms and is influenced by different mind-sets – and these lead members to follow certain courses of action.

Underlying Causes of Member Commitment

In accordance with the literature on organisational commitment, we have defined commitment as a psychological state (feelings and/or beliefs relating to the relationship of the members with the co-operative) that may be indicative of the desire, need and/or the obligation to remain within an organisation. We have referred to the three types of commitment that may be experienced by members to varying degrees: affective, continuance, and normative. It seems probable that the psychological state that these commitment types reflect is the result of differing underlying causes, which will have different implications for member behaviour and their eagerness to remain within the organisation.

We analysed each of the underlying mind-sets of commitment on the basis of interviews with the members. We used the model shown in Figure 1, which is an adaptation of the general model of organisational commitment proposed by Meyer and Herscovitch (2001), Meyer and Allen (1991), and the specific model proposed by Sharma and Irving (2005) for family businesses.

Affective commitment

The underlying mind-set in the case of affective commitment is a desire to pursue a focal

behaviour. In the case of the co-operative, this can be viewed as a mind-set involving the desire to continue to be involved in the organisation, reflected in identification with and positive feelings towards the co-operative.

a. **Co-operative identity.** According to their statements we found that members possess this mind-set when they *identify* with the co-operative: the co-operative is their home, their business, and they believe that it operates better than others. They defend the co-operative against any attack or criticism. When there is a strong sense of identification with the co-operative, members defend the co-operative, take part in decision-making, and bring all the produce of their farm to the co-operative. Grosskopf et al (2009), refer to these members as “active (patronising) members”. By contrast, where members do not feel this sense of identification with the co-operative, they view the co-operative as a service and if they fail to see immediate results they are willing to abandon the co-operative, or at least moderate their relations and take their olives elsewhere.

b. **Interest in co-operation.** Moreover, we have observed that members experience affective commitment when they are aware of the importance of *cooperation as a means of achieving their own objectives*. Those individuals who firmly believe that their objectives can best be achieved by joining forces with their peers have a tendency to make an effort above and beyond the call of duty within the co-operative.

In accordance with certain theories that have been put forward in the literature (Mowday et al, 1982; Meyer & Allen, 1991) we feel that the

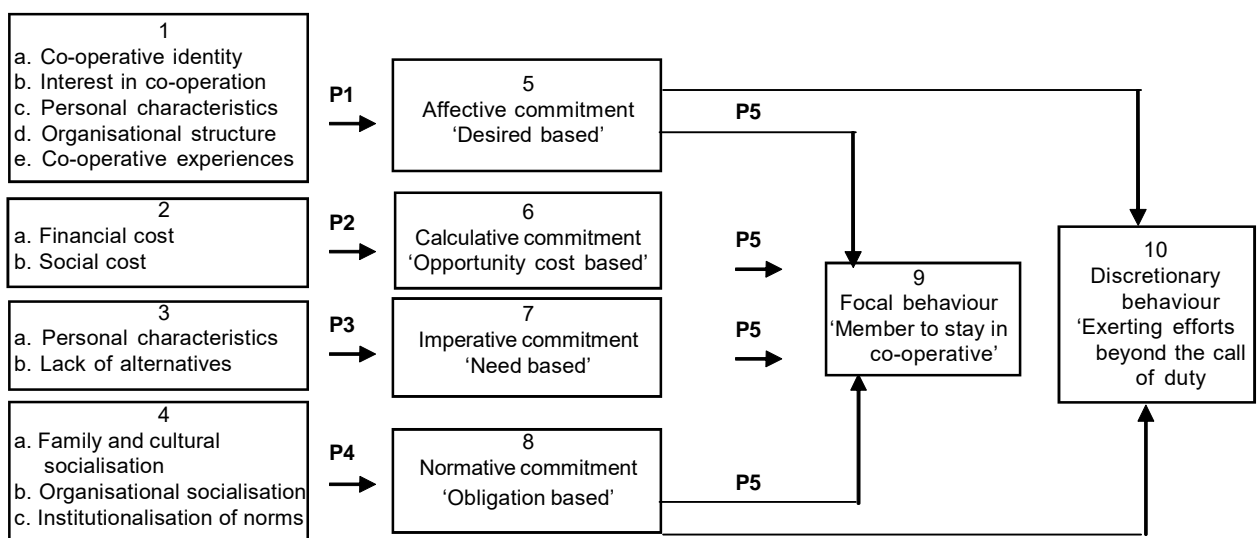


Figure 1: Bases of Co-operative Member Commitment: Antecedents and Expected Outcomes
Source: adapted from Sharma and Irving (2005).

underlying causes of affective commitment can be classified using the following categories: personal characteristics, structural characteristics, and the experiences of members during the course of their association with the co-operative.

- **Personal characteristics:**

During the interviews attention was drawn to the fact that members own farms of differing sizes and this implies varying degrees of involvement in farming. Thus we find members who are exclusively farmers, and others who have other jobs and only take an interest in their farm when receiving payment for their harvest. Moreover, the training and educational background of the members is also highly varied, some members have no formal education and are barely able to read and write, while others have a university degree.

Bearing in mind these personal characteristics we find that those members with fewer possibilities for self-sufficiency and with smaller farms are perhaps more likely to place greater importance on co-operation. Nevertheless, larger farmers may also seek co-operation in order to create stronger organisations – and their personal views on the need to attain objectives, affiliation, or self-sufficiency are more palpable. Training and education serve as an introduction to the processes of co-operation and illustrate the advantages of co-operation. We have not found evidence to support the view that dependency on farming leads to greater enthusiasm for co-operation. If members fail to see the importance of co-operation then they show little interest in the co-operative, and when a problem occurs, their efforts supporting the organisation decrease.

- **Organisational structure:**

It is important to underline the fact that, as we have stated above, the special characteristics of the organisations under study and their structure may influence member commitment. As indicated by Münkner (2006), these organisations have grown, have changed their internal structure and have a more heterogeneous membership.

This type of organisation is very deeply-rooted within the olive-oil sector and has a singular structure that is governed by the general principles of co-operativism. These principles

and structural characteristics are reflected in the democratic participation of the members; profit-sharing on the basis of the amount of produce delivered by each member; the provision of information and training; and the defence of the interests of the members.

Members show a higher degree of commitment when they see that everyone receives fair and equal treatment; that the activity of the co-operative is carried out in the members' interests; that their complaints are taken seriously; and that, in short, members are important people within the organisation. Affective commitment increases when a co-operative encourages participation, spares no effort in terms of providing members with information, and treats all members equally by applying the same rules to everyone.

It is interesting to note the perception by members of the governing board, which is often seen as a mediator between the co-operative and members. Commitment increases and the members identify more strongly when they trust the co-operative and believe in its goodwill, ability, and honesty.

At the same time, commitment from members who are active on the governing board has an impact on other members. Members of the board who act in their own interests rather than the interests of the collective create lower levels of commitment among members. In accordance with stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997) we feel that co-operative behaviour is encouraged throughout the organisation when the members of the board act in a collective and pro-organisational manner. On the other hand, in cases where the principals (members) behave in accordance with the principal-agent schemes proposed by agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) the membership is not influenced by the board, and the board members will feel cheated by the opportunistic behaviour of the membership.

When the members of the board are closely identified with the organisation, the members are able to see the personal power of the board members, as described by French and Raven (1959), rather than their coercive or legitimate power. A management philosophy with a high degree of commitment

and participation and which is based on open communication and trust will enable a closer relationship with members and more commitment to the organisation. Where the members and the board establish a stewardship relationship, the potential result of the group improves. In any event, the underlying causes of organisational structure may be conditioned by the experiences of the membership within the co-operative.

• **The experience of members:**

We have observed that the degree of member commitment is a result of their experiences within the co-operative to which they belong. Members evaluate whether their needs have been met by the co-operative and whether it is at odds with their own values. If members feel that their experience within the co-operative is largely positive and that they are treated fairly and are made to feel important, then their affective commitment is likely to be higher.

Meyer and Allen (1991, p70) identify two categories of work experiences: experiences that satisfy the need to feel physically and psychologically comfortable within the organisation, and experiences that contribute towards a feeling of rivalry.

In interviews with the members we encountered terms such as 'feel protected' and 'comforting' when speaking about the organisation – so indicating a deeper bond with the co-operative. Nevertheless, we observed that those members who were most committed to their co-operative were perhaps those members who placed more importance on their co-operative's competitiveness in comparison with other co-operatives – and who believed that this competitiveness could be increased by amalgamating with others. The sense of personal importance that evolves during membership has an extremely significant impact on the development of affective commitment amongst members.

Our analysis has led us to make the following proposition:

P1. *Members will display high levels of affective commitment (mind-set of desire) to remain within the co-operative when their individual identity is closely aligned with their co-operative, and/or when they perceive that their interests are aligned with opportunities*

afforded to them by their co-operative. Personal characteristics, the nature of the organisation, and the experiences of each member will have a positive or negative influence on these perceptions of identity and belief in cooperation.

Continuance commitment

This type of commitment reflects recognition of the inherent costs of abandoning the organisation (calculative commitment). Thus, any circumstance that increases the perceived costs of abandonment are considered as an underlying cause and have a second dimension – such as member recognition that there are no viable alternatives (imperative commitment).

• **Calculative commitment:**

This develops when individuals feel that they would miss valuable investments or specific rewards if they abandoned the organisation. Setting out from the model proposed by Sharma and Irving (2005), we found that financial cost and social costs were the underlying causes of calculative commitment. Members place paramount importance on financial costs. They decide to join the co-operative and remain a part of the co-operative because they see this as the best choice in view of the alternatives. The co-operative is close to their farm, sells at a better price, and enables members to participate in investments that would not otherwise have been available.

We have also observed that members feel that abandoning the organisation would entail social costs. Abandonment would not only affect their personal economy, but rather, as they view the co-operative as the driving force that propels the development of the surrounding area, they feel that mismanagement of the co-operative implies high social costs. The co-operative is able to provide non-financial benefits such as the ability to influence political, social, and cultural events.

• **Imperative commitment:**

Imperative commitment occurs when members feel that they have no alternative but to remain within the co-operative. We found that members who see few alternatives live in small villages that are highly dependent on farming. As they see scant possibilities of professional development in the future it is

more likely that they feel a greater need to remain within the co-operative.

Thus, we put forward the following propositions as the underlying causes of continuance commitment.

P2. *Members display a high level of calculative commitment ('have to' mind-set) to remain within the co-operative when they perceive their co-operative as being of significant financial value and/or perceive the significant social costs of abandonment.*

P3. *Members who see few alternative possibilities for development display high levels of imperative commitment ('need to' mind-set) to remain within the co-operative.*

Normative commitment

This type of commitment is based on a mind-set of obligation or a feeling of 'having to' follow a certain course of action. The literature on organisational commitment refers to a sense of loyalty towards an organisation and the internalisation of the view that this loyalty is important. As Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) point out, this mind-set develops as a result of the internalisation of norms via socialisation within the family and organisational and cultural socialisation.

In the co-operative under study, many members form a part of the organisation because their parents gave land to each of their children as they came of age, and as the fields are integrated in the co-operative, the children continue to form a part of the co-operative.

Upon entering the co-operative, these members see their membership as a traditional norm that must not be changed for the good of their family and village, wherein the co-operative plays an important role as a meeting point where members can develop and forge an identity.

It is possible that this feeling is stronger among those members whose forefathers, grandparents, and parents were involved in establishing the co-operative. Many of these co-operatives are 50 or 60 years old and members from previous generations recount the serious difficulties experienced by farmers when attempting to sell their produce before the foundation of the co-operative.

Members have a greater sense of obligation

when they see that the norms of the co-operative have served to develop the organisation and make it more competitive. They hope to continue to be involved with the co-operative because they feel a strong sense of obligation and identify with family, social, and cultural norms. It follows that,

P4. *Members will exhibit high levels of normative commitment (mind-set of obligation) to remain in the organisation when they have been exposed to extensive social, cultural, or family-based socialisation and see that the development of these norms equates with success.*

Consequences of the four types of member commitment

Up to this point, we have seen that members in the co-operative under study may display different forms of commitment that define their level of involvement within the organisation. As a result of their degree of commitment they wish to remain within the organisation to a greater or lesser extent (focal behaviour); while those who are most committed will attempt to make efforts above and beyond the call of duty (discretionary behaviours).³

At this stage we feel that it is appropriate to take a closer look at the manner in which the various forms of commitment affect result expectations in terms of focal and discretionary behaviour. In other words, we will consider the consequences in terms of the behaviour of the members and the nature of the relationship between the various underlying causes of commitment and the focal and discretionary behaviour of members.

It seems clear that the form of commitment (affective, normative, and calculative) influences member continuance within the organisation (focal behaviour). Members will continue as members when they feel a sentimental attachment, are obligated to the organisation, or dependent on the organisation. In this sense we observe that olive oil co-operatives are characterised by an ascendant, or at least continuous, evolution. The number of members changes very little from year to year and it is felt that this will continue to be the case.

We also observe that affective commitment generates greater involvement in the organisation than calculative or normative commitment. When individuals who had felt

obligated (or felt that membership was the best or only option) cease to experience these feelings, or experience them less intensely, we then see a corresponding reduction in their commitment to the co-operative. Members who view the co-operative as a service and who have no sense of involvement only make short-term commitments to the co-operative. If they fail to see the economic results that they had hoped for within a year, then they will take their harvests elsewhere in the hope of obtaining better results.

On the basis of these arguments we make the following propositions:

P5. *Member commitment, regardless of the mind-set on which it is based, will be positively related to the likelihood of remaining within the co-operative.*

The distinction between commitment types is not only important in terms of focal behaviour, but rather, there is evidence to suggest that discretionary commitment and discretionary behaviour vary in accordance with these types.

Certain members display a high degree of concern for their co-operative: they show interest in forming part of the governing bodies within the co-operative, and respect the norms of the organisation. Other members never participate or seem reluctant to take on the objectives of the organisation as their own. With regards discretionary behaviour, we observe differential effects in the relationship between the bases of discretionary commitment and member behaviour. This relationship is more pronounced than the commitment-focal behaviour relationship.

Affective commitment is based on a strong identification with and a desire to contribute to the co-operative. Therefore, members with a greater degree of affective commitment attempt to support investments, accept changes, participate in assemblies, and even where they fail to participate, they ratify decisions because they have a great deal of confidence in the management of the organisation. These individuals bring their entire harvest to the co-operative because they feel that a stable level of production is beneficial for them. They make use of the range of services provided by the co-operative when it suits their needs. These members show the greatest degree of involvement in the processes aimed at making the co-operative more competitive. They take an active interest in product quality and discuss

the future of the co-operative.

Normative commitment is based on a sense of obligation towards the organisation. Members submit to internalised cultural or family-based norms. The organisation can also foster a certain degree of commitment via its own norms, providing that these are clear, useful, and acceptable to the majority of members. Members feel obliged to abide by these norms because they feel that the norms are in the best interests of all.

Calculative commitment is based on the view that the co-operative will protect the interests of members. Members with a greater degree of calculative commitment will attempt to control the co-operative in order to obtain better services and protect their rights. They measure results on the basis of the price received by the member for the produce delivered to the co-operative. This price permits them to make comparisons with other organisations, thereby enabling them to feel satisfied with and involved in the co-operative. The scope of behaviour can vary. Some members take a passive role because they do not feel that their participation is an essential part of the preservation of their rights. Other members are more involved because they feel that they will be able to protect or increase their rights within the co-operative. In any event, we feel that this behaviour is more susceptible to change than the behaviour exhibited by members with an affective commitment.

Imperative commitment is based on a dependency on the cooperative because no viable alternative exists, or where members perceive this to be the case. Imperative commitment provides a very weak base to motivate individuals to carry out the efforts that are required to meet the objectives of the organisation.

On the basis of these arguments we make the following propositions:

P6. *Affective commitment will have the strongest positive relationship with the discretionary behaviour by members that leads to the efficient management of the co-operative.*

P7. *When compared to affective commitment, normative and calculative commitments show weaker relationships with the discretionary behaviour by members that leads to the efficient management of the co-operative.*

P8. *When compared to affective commitment, imperative commitment shows very weak or even negative relationships with the discretionary behaviour by member that leads to efficient management of the co-operative.*

Conclusions and Implications

In this article, we set out to understand the following questions related to member commitment toward their co-operative: are all members of a co-operative equally committed? What underlying mind-sets drive their commitment? What are the influencing factors and consequences of different bases of commitment?

Organisational commitment research helped us identify four mind-sets that drive the commitment of members. These are: affective (based on desire); normative (based on obligation); calculative (based on opportunity cost); and imperative (based on need). Taking several previous models of organisational commitment as a starting-point we propose a model outlining the antecedents and consequences of the different bases of member commitment (Figure 1). We also propose that although the different bases of commitment result in similar commitment-focal behavioural relations, they produce varying levels of discretionary behaviour, which in turn, lead to varying level of effectiveness and business performance (Sharma, 2005).

Our contribution to the literature on co-operatives is significant because few studies deal with the importance of member commitment, and existing studies treat the concept as one-dimensional. Prior to this study, no attempt was made to understand the underlying causes and behavioural consequences of the different types of commitment. This article takes the first step towards untangling the shades of member commitment by proposing that: a) different mind-sets can guide the willingness of members to continue in their co-operative; b) each base of commitment is a product of different antecedents; and c) there are varying behavioural consequences produced by the different bases of commitment. Our model will serve as a guide for further research.

The areas considered in this study have interesting implications for professional co-operative managers (or shareholders)

involved in running the processes that enable organisational commitment and who wish to take innovative action that will ensure the competitiveness of the co-operative. Member commitment does not always have an impact on co-operatives, and this will depend on the mind-set that forms the basis of the commitment and the motives of members for continuing in the co-operative. Therefore, we feel that it is worthwhile considering the development of a commitment profile of the ideal member of an organisation.

An adequate level of organisational commitment reinforces the characteristics of the co-operative. The relationship of commitment between the member and the co-operative, together with the special cultural values that pervade democratic participation, may constitute rare and valuable resources as envisaged by the theory of resources and capacities (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). This does not imply that co-operative managers should cease to pursue the objectives of economic efficiency, but rather that these objectives should be subordinate to the maintenance and improvement of the special relationship of commitment between members and the co-operative.

When the membership sees that they are treated fairly and that the co-operative acts in the interests of its members – then participation and information-flow is encouraged. As a result, there is increased affective commitment and more members are willing to make efforts above and beyond the call of duty. Training also plays an important role: greater awareness will enable the implementation of processes of cooperation without the reluctance that is inherent in a lack of knowledge. The board plays a key role as a driving force behind shared objectives by generating security and confidence among the members and maintaining an essential culture of involvement and commitment.

In short, the results of this work analyse the consequences of member commitment in a co-operative. The validity and universal application of these results cannot be affirmed until further research has been carried out in other sectors. It should be remembered that this study refers to a specific sector (olive oil production) and a specific type of agricultural co-operative (olive oil co-operatives). Therefore, empirical studies need to be conducted to increase our awareness of the importance of each of the forms of member commitment:

commitment profiles must be analysed with reference to the interactive effects of these forms on the commitment process. Future

research should also measure the different variables within the model of underlying causes and consequences.

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Notes

- 1 Further analysis of the family influence on the business decisions taken by co-operative members is available in the Hernández study (2001, p88).
- 2 While suspicion may be a characteristic of farmers generally, we feel that the members in our study are referring to their own experiences, or at least the experience of others in the same sector (Hernández, 2001, p122).
- 3 A term used by Organ, (1988) as cited in Sharma and Irving (2005, p25).