

Editorial

The three peer-reviewed papers in this issue continue to reflect the international nature and scope of the Journal of Co-operative Studies. As we will see, however, the issues dealt with in these papers from the Netherlands, Sweden and Israel, are applicable to co-operative management and development anywhere in the world. They relate to key aspects of co-operative leadership and entrepreneurial practice and of the development of social networks on which co-operative business loyalty is often built, that have general relevance and appeal.

If the peer-reviewed papers are international, the three short articles, or think-pieces, all relate directly to co-operative activity or research conducted in the UK. Two of the articles are by academics researching co-operation in British universities and the third is from a member of a retail co-operative who endeavours to relate a co-operative formula to work practice.

The papers by Jos Bijman and Bart Doorneweert from Wageningen University and Wageningen UR in the Netherlands, and by Reuven Shapira from the Western Galilee Academic College in Israel are very different pieces of work. The background and experience of the authors are different, as is their tone and style of writing. However, both are concerned with the development of an entrepreneurial leadership within co-operatives, which not only keeps them true to first principles but enables them to compete effectively in the market place. Bijman and Doorneweert explore the way in which a co-operative can embody a collective entrepreneurial spirit focused on the achievement of business and economic goals. They see the achievement of this mainly in the way the members of a co-operative actively engage in governance and decision making processes. To quote the authors:

If not, that is if decisions-making is left to professional managers, co-operatives risk to slide off into the same quasi-entrepreneurship that troubles so many publicly listed companies”.

For them, entrepreneurship within co-operative

requires the active participation of the members and cannot be left to managers alone.

Shapira, writing in a different yet challenging style, also has problems with co-operative managers. He sees a certain inevitability in degeneration of the leadership of most co-operative managers, originally committed to maintaining co-operative principles, into some form of capitalist oligarchic autocracy. In reference mostly to kibbutzim and inter-kibbutz co-operatives, he explores the complexities of maintaining creative and transformational leadership within co-operatives and discusses some ways forward, including limiting the term of office of leaders in co-operatives. At the heart of the matter, however, seems to be the commitment and capacity of the leader, staff and members to preserve a high-trust democratic culture within which creative and transformational leadership can flourish. However, for Shapira, preserving and maintaining such a culture is fraught with difficulties.

The third peer-reviewed paper by John Enander, Andreas Melin and Jerker Nilsson, from Sweden, explores an important but perhaps as yet insufficiently explored area of co-operative development. It examines the role of trust-creating social networks in the creation and maintenance of business partnerships. Enander and Melin are both forestry engineers in Sweden and Nilsson is an academic from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. In this collaborative paper, they discuss the findings of a small research project into the reasons why producers in the forestry industry choose to sell products to either a co-operative or an investor owned firm. They discover that the influence of social networks is stronger among co-operative suppliers than among suppliers to investor-owned buyers. Building those social networks relates, of course, to the themes of the previous two papers insofar as effective entrepreneurial leadership should aim to build trust and strong links with members, staff and suppliers alike.

The first of the three shorter articles is an update by Richard Simmons and Johnston Birchall of Stirling University, of the findings of

a two and a half year study to investigate the role and potential of co-operatives in poverty reduction. An introductory article on this study, now published by The Co-operative College, appeared in this journal in April 2007. The article outlines how co-operatives can make a greater contribution to poverty reduction relative to other types of organisation.

The second paper by Rob Rowlands of the University of Birmingham Centre for Urban & Regional Studies is a think piece on developing new co-operative models of housing development. This is timely given the growth in political interest in mutual and co-operative solutions to contemporary social issues. The third paper is again a think-piece by Britta Werner, a member of Unicorn Grocery in Manchester, on the formula for co-operation introduced at the 2010 Annual Co-operative Congress in Plymouth. This short reflection

on the formula shows how it can be used within a worker co-operative.

Finally, the journal would not be complete without its book reviews. There are two reviews on contemporary issues in co-operation, one on the role of co-operatives in humanising the global economy and the other on innovations and developments in co-operative banking. For those of us in the North of England, the third book review on the Workers' Educational Association has a special significance. For over a hundred years, the WEA has made education available to generations of working people, among which are many who were or who became actively involved in the co-operative movement in the region.

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