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Examining the Association Between Group Cohesion and Group Performance in the Co-Operative Movement

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Abstract
Theoretical and empirical studies on group cohesion and group performance have been focused of many scholars over the past fifty years. Most of the studied has demonstrated the significant association between group cohesion and group performance. However, not much consideration has been devoted to the fact that whether or not group cohesion would effect group performance in the context of co-operative movement. Hence, with that limitation, this study examines to which respondent's perceptions of the association between group cohesion and group performance in co-operative movement. The results also present new viewpoints for co-operative movement where members' strong relationship can further underwrite to the group performance. The degree of cohesiveness among members governs the success of group performance in moving toward its future direction. The study also highlighted the need for future empirical research on group cohesion and group performance in others context, which could test this association.

1. Introduction

Groups are integral parts of organizations and continuous research has been, and is being conducted to better understand the dynamics that occur in such groups (Weingart, 1997). The phenomenon of group cohesion has become increasing interest and important to the researchers (Griffith, 1987). It has been one of the extensively studied construct in group literature and the central feature that related to group performance (Bettenhausen, 1991). Generally, cohesion could be understand as the degree to which member of a group are attached to one another and have the desire to remain a part of the group. Mudrack (1989a), stated that group cohesion as 'one that sticks together-one whose members are bounded to one another and the group as a whole'. Furthermore according to Zaccaro & Lowe (1986), group cohesion remained as one of the most promising construct for researchers because it's contribute to the high degree of group performance. However, defining the group construct of group cohesion and measuring the consequences of these construct to group performance, remain a debatable (Mudrack, 1989b). Another important aspect, which needs attentions, is, the kind of construct that affect cohesion- performance relationship.

Co-operative movement can be described as an autonomous organization where

members come together voluntarily in order to achieve joint interests and joint aspirations in the field of economic, social and culture, regardless of gender, socio-cultural and religious body which is owned jointly and democratically controlled (Salleh, Arshad, Shaarani, & Kasmuri, 2008). The cooperatives are formed and owned by a group of individuals for the purpose of improving their standard of living and enjoying the social services provided (Kamsi, 2008). The underlying philosophy of co-operative movement emphasizes on service and the well-being of members and governed by seven cooperative principles that have been universally accepted and adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Among the stated principles is that the group members' economic participation in the cooperatives activities, and thus the movement performance depends largely on the degree of relationship or cohesion between the cooperatives and their members. The degree of cohesion will determine the successfulness of cooperatives' activities such as in the economy, social and culture aspects (Sapran, 2010). Theoretically, group cohesion has come to play an important role in the study of group dynamics. Researchers have studied this concept or theory in order to understand what determines the development of cohesion and the effects of increased or decreased cohesion on the group performance (Stogdill, 1972). A common underlying concept in the area of group cohesion was proposed by Carron in 1982. Carron (1982) defined cohesion as a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its goals and objectives. Although there have been numerous studies that included those from sport, military, education etc on cohesion and group performance (Chang & Bordia, 2001;Dion, 2000; Mullen & Copper, 1994) the findings are inconclusive. There are only few empirical studies, which extensively examined how group cohesion affect group performance in others context (Gully et. al.1995).With this regard, this study will aims to investigate the association between group cohesion and group performance. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the influence of task and social cohesion and group performance in the context of co-operative movement.

Conceptualization and measurement of group cohesion dated back to Festinger et al. (1950), who defined group cohesion as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group. Furthermore cohesion also is described as group member's inclinations to forge social bonds, resulting in members sticking together and remaining united (Carron, 1982). However Friedkin (2004) stated that researchers may adopt any definition for cohesion, providing it is clear and appropriate by a logical analysis. The variety school of thought used to evaluate cohesion results is largely responsible for the wide variety of definitions and measures that included those from sociology, political science, military psychology, and industrial-organizational psychology (Dion, 2000; Mullen & Copper, 1994). Meanwhile a huge number of studies had been devoted in exploring the relationship between cohesion and group performance. For example a study (Dorfman & Stehan, 1984) has empirically investigated the relationship between cohesion and group performance stated that a highly cohesive group contributes to the higher group performance. In meta-analyses conducted by Evans & Dion (1991) found the association between cohesion and performance to be a positive one, with highly cohesive group outperformed low cohesive groups. Moreover, Mullen & Copper (1994) meta-analyses also support the existence of a significant relationship between cohesiveness and performance. They found that high group cohesion leads to higher subsequent levels of cohesion. Beal et.al (2003) conducted another meta-analyses of cohesion and group performance literature and reported that a significant positive relationship between both variables. In the context of sport, a vast number of studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between cohesion and group performance. For example Widmeyer et al. (1993) indicated that 83% of the investigations conducted reported a positive relationship between cohesion and group performance. The military is another area that continues to emphasize the importance of cohesion and group performance. In studies conducted by Kellett (1982) and Shamir, Braininm, Zakay & Popper (2000), it was found that military units demonstrating high levels of cohesion frequently produced the best performance.

More recent studies (Carless & De Paola, 2000; Widmeyer et al. 1985; Cota et al. 1995), introduced the concept of separating task and social cohesion when defining group cohesion. They tested the group cohesion construct and concluded the group cohesion construct appears to influence group performance. Chang & Bordia (2001) conducted a study that examined a number of variables related to the cohesiveness and group performance relationship. They found that task cohesion to be the only significant predictor of subjective performances measures. Yoo & Alavi (2001) found that task participation played a more important role than social presence in determining the degree of consensus among group members in compute mediated communication environments. This result demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between task-oriented groups and high performance. Wech, et al. (1998) presented support of a positive relationship between perceived task competence and group performance with cohesiveness as an explanation for variances in performance. Stangor (2004) provided a review of research regarding task cohesion being directly related to group performance and, in some cases, being negatively related. Cota et al. (1995) argued that making division of task cohesion is significant not only for the conceptual articulation of group cohesion, but also for understanding the relationship between cohesion and performance. Meanwhile according to Langfred (1998), cohesion is not productive if social aspect of cohesion is considered to explain group performance as compare to task cohesion. This may be so because too much of emphasize on social relations could detrimental to the task at hand. Moreover social interaction patterns may be detrimental to group performance unless group goals are related to group tasks (Mullen et al., 1994).

Bartkus (1995) found that highly cohesive groups were more productive, when leader exhibited strong task initiation behavior as compare to social initiation behavior. Seung & James (2002) stated that interpersonal cohesion was positively related to interaction frequency ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), which was in turn negatively related to group performance ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$). In addition, Gully et al., (1995) findings indicate the negative relationship between interpersonal cohesion and group performance.

The research framework displayed below consists of two key variables namely group cohesion and group performance. These variables will be explored in order to identify their association that they may have on the co-operative movement. Figure 1 presents all the variables in this study. The group cohesion variable primarily focused on task and social cohesion dimensions as the independent variables and group performance as the dependent variable.

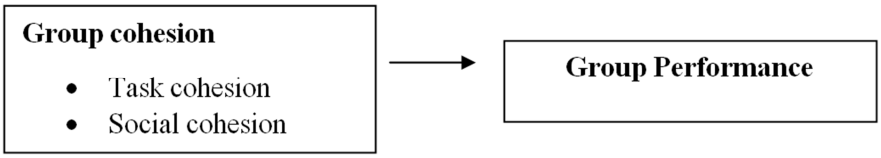

Figure 1. *Research Framework.*

2. Method

2.1. Sample & Data Collection

The respondents in this study were manager or executive of the co-operatives. They were considered as the most likely key person that can furnish information, since they had professional experience working in groups. List of all registered co-operatives were obtained from the Statutory and Registration Department of Malaysia Co-operative Commission (2011) and it is the best available to extract in sampling procedures. A total of 380 questionnaires were posted with self-address envelope to the co-operative movement. The completion of these questionnaires was entirely voluntary and responses were anonymous. 248 questionnaires were collected which resulted in 65.2% response rate.

2.2. Measures

All variables in research framework were measured with validated instruments. The scale consists of self-reported items scale in a five-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree).

2.3. Group Cohesion

The group environment questionnaire (GEQ) (Carron, Widmeyer & Brawley, 1985) used to measure group cohesion in this study. The GEQ measure the social cohesion and task cohesion (as a subscale) to capture the distinctions between these two constructs. All items are rated on a five – point scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In this study, a composite score of the 18 items was used for each respondents and represents overall rating of cohesion. This was computed by summing each items responded to by the respondents and the dividing the total by the number of items on the assessment. Composite scores were also calculated for the 9 items that assess task cohesion and the 9 items that assess social cohesion.

A six-item subjective scale assessing the perceived quality and productivity of the group (Hackman, 1990) was used to measure group performance.

3. Results

Respondents for the present study were 248 managers or executives of the co-operatives. From this, 134 respondents were male, while the 114 comprised of female respondents. Majority of the respondents were Malay amounted about 92 percent. There were proportionate amount between single and married respondents. About 87.90 percent had 3 – 5 years of experiences or attached with the co-op, while 12.09 percent had less than 2 years attached with the co-op. 89.91 percent of the respondents were involved with co-operatives that had been in establishment at the range of 11 – 15 years, while only 7.25 at the range of less than 10 years and 2.82 percent at more than 16 years.

Table 1. *The respondents' profile.*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	134	45.96
Female	114	54.04
Race		
Malay	227	91.53
Chinese	15	6.04
Indian	6	2.43
Tenure		
Less than 2 years	30	12.09
3 – 5 years	218	87.90
More than 5 years	0	0
Co-op Establishment		
Less than 10 years	18	7.25
11-15 years	223	89.91
More than 16 years	7	2.82

Reliability analysis was conducted in order to examine the internal consistency of each instrument (Table 2, cronbach's alpha coefficients for the four assessment suggesting a high

level of reliability across all assessment)

Table 2. *Reliability Coefficients for the major variables.*

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
1. Task cohesion	9	0.81
2. Social cohesion	9	0.83
3. Group cohesion	18	0.88
4. Group performance	6	0.86

It has been evidenced that, there is a significant correlation between group cohesion and group performance (r =0.54, p<0.01). Furthermore, results showed that social cohesion (r = .53, p<.01) and task cohesion (r =0 .43<0.01) have a significant correlation with group performance. However, it was noticed that task cohesion has a strong relationship with group performance relatively with social cohesion.

Table 3. *Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables.*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Group cohesion	5.56	1.07	1			
2. Task cohesion	5.66	0.70	0.52*	1		
3. Social cohesion	4.58	1.13	0.47*	0.35*	1	
4. Group performance	3.78	0.65	0.54*	0.43*	0.52*	1

Note: (N=248). All correlations were significant at *p<0.01

Task Cohesion and Social Cohesion support significantly predicted group performance F-value = 58.603, p<0.05. Adjusted R^2 = .591, the model explains 59.1 percent of the variances in group performance. Task cohesion β=0.554, p<.05 makes the strongest unique contribution in explaining the group performance.

Table 4. *Regression analysis.*

Variables	β	Sig.
Task Cohesion	0.554	.000
Social Cohesion	0.290	.000

Notes: R^2 = .602 , Adjusted R^2 = .591 , F-value = 58.603, *p<0.05*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results demonstrated that participants working in group cohesion do have a significant relationship with group performance in the context of co-operative movement. The findings of this study also provide provision for the group-research theory outlook of group performance. It's clearly validated the relationship between group cohesion-group performances which consistent with previous studies as a one-dimensional construct. (Mullen & Copper, 1994; Shamir, Braininm, Zakay & Popper, 2000). In addition, the results showed the benefits of group cohesion exert on group performance. The examination of the contributions of the two components of group cohesion yielded a very interesting result. Firstly, there was a significant association of task cohesion on group performance. It is task cohesion that matters to group performance. These results also maintain previous studies that when a greater degree of task cohesion exists, groups will perform better (Yoo & Alavi, 2001; Stangor, 2004; Langfred, 1998). Secondly, there was a relationship of social cohesion and group performance. These results showed that socializing among group members did show significant correlation with group performance. It is task cohesion that strongly explain the group performance and not social cohesion. Meaning that, group that have a high level of task oriented have the tendency to perform better, in the context of cooperatives movement and far more effective to conform group performance. In sum, this study provides some insightful information of group cohesion as well as task and social cohesion as predictors of group performance. Moreover, enlighten the need of group cohesion among co-operator, more particularly, both task and social cohesion in enhancing the group performance. It's important that, in this context, co-operators show higher task and social cohesion in sustaining the group and cooperatives performance. Assumed the significance of group performance in today's organizations, the findings will be valuable to others who involve in the theory and practice of this field and future studies will find the areas of group dynamic amusing and fruitful.

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