

**Workers, Consumers and Small Business:
Preliminary Reflections on
Stakeholders and Co-operative Values and
Principles**

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Workers, Consumers and Small Business: Preliminary Reflections on Stakeholders and Co-operative Values and Principles

This paper is a reflection on the nature of co-operation and the logical consequences of co-operative values and principles on the relationships between the three fundamental types of 'stakeholders' involved in co-operative business around the world today. This is not a simple task and this paper is a preliminary exploration both of what will be called the new 'stakeholder typology' and the exploration of how the values and principles might apply to the relationships between the stakeholders. This latter issue is of immense practical importance since the practical application of co-operative values and principles is the root of the 'co-operative difference' and it is the presence of this difference that gives co-operatives legitimacy and a powerful unique selling point. Conversely, it is the absence of co-operative difference that undermines co-operative legitimacy and leads to long-term business weakness.

Traditionally the primary focus of most co-operators has been to apply the co-operative values and principles within our co-operatives and credit unions to the relationships among members. That entails thinking through the implications of the values and principles for those relationships. Yet one of the principles of co-operation calls for co-operation among co-operatives and that has to imply the application of thinking through the implications of all the values and principles for those relationships as well. Another implication is, how do the values and principles apply to all the stakeholders within a co-operative as well? Most of our co-operatives have a single class of members, farmers, crafts people, hardware store owners, consumers, workers and so on. What are the implications of applying the values and principles to the relationships between these stakeholders within a co-operative?

In attempting to respond to these questions the first challenge is to sort through the differing types of co-operatives according to the purpose intended by their key stakeholder. The concept of stakeholders is well established. "The idea that corporations have stakeholders has now become commonplace in the management literature, both professional and academic." Donaldson and Preston (1995) Scott and Lane (2000) also make a compelling case for "describing organizational identity as emerging from complex, dynamic and reciprocal interactions among managers, organizational members and other stakeholders." For the purposes of this paper; A) a 'stakeholder' is defined as a group of persons who have a distinctive stake in the success of a co-operative, or put another way a stake in the ability of the co-operative to meet some type of human and/or community need(s); and B) the four fundamental types of 'stakeholders' involved in all co-operatives are small businesses, consumers, workers and communities. For the purposes of this initial exploration, I propose to focus mostly on the application of the co-operative values primarily to three types of stakeholders: small businesses; consumers; and workers.

The logical extension of this typology of four principle types of ‘stakeholders’ is to group co-operatives into five types: consumer co-operatives, small business co-operatives, co-operatives of workers, community co-operatives and multi-stakeholder co-operatives. (See Table 1) The intent is to look at these key stakeholder relationships using the co-operative values and principles as the guideposts to the nature of co-operation applied to all stakeholders within a co-op and among co-operatives of differing types. This typology is very close and owes much to the typology set out by Briscoe and Ward (2005 pp 14-19). The key difference is to focus on the stakeholder notion and the change in terminology related to small business co-operatives. While Briscoe and Ward use the terminology “producer” co-operatives and include the same types of businesses, for example an Australian garage owners co-op (Capricorn) the terminology “small business” seems to capture better what such co-operatives have in common with each other, while use of the terminology “producer” seems more applicable to farmer and fisher co-ops.

What do the values and principles tells us about how consumers, workers and primary producers should relate to each other? Put another way, the values and principles of co-operation are not, by their nature, easily limited to behavior within a co-operative. If one is to practice honesty, then it seems an inherent conflict to say we will be honest with the other members of the co-operative but allow dishonesty as long as it is done with non-members. There is also an inherent conflict in the proposition that we would apply the principles to our relationships with other co-operative members but not to other stakeholders within the same co-op who are not members. If we accept that the values and principles extend beyond the co-operative then what does that mean for how consumers or farmers would treat workers or for how workers would treat farmers or consumers? What does it mean for how worker co-ops would treat producer co-ops and consumer co-ops and so on.

Consumer Co-operatives	Worker Co-operatives	Small Business Co-operatives	Community Co-operatives	Multi-stakeholder Co-operatives
Retail	Services	Farmers	Development	Retail
Utility	Manufacturing	Fishers	Tourism	Child care
Housing	Transportation	Wood harvesters	Planning	Health care
Credit Unions	Mining	Purchasing	Local Services	Food
Insurance	Food processing	Crafts		Pasture
Funeral	Retail	Marketing		
Farm supply	Farming	Etc.		
Etc.	Etc.			

Table 1 – A Stakeholder Typology of Co-operatives

The Key Stakeholders and Their Co-operatives

For the most part, co-operatives in the English-speaking world are consumer-owned co-operatives. They come in many types: retail, funeral, natural gas, electricity, financial

services (credit unions), insurance, housing and so on. One has only to imagine a good or service that is consumable to imagine a co-operative being formed by consumers to provide themselves with it. The impetus for consumers to co-operate has been to achieve fair prices and/or to protect themselves from various types of exploitation such as adulterated products or dishonest practices.

While there are significant differences between types of consumer co-operatives, especially in terms of the importance of the good or services to the consumer, the fundamental idea underlying the consumer co-operative is the same across the differing types. The membership is made up of consumers who hire workers and invest in capital goods to provide themselves with the good or service in question. Frequently, especially in the case of food, what they consume has its origin with a primary producer.

The use of 'small business' as a category of co-operatives is I believe novel. Small business has long been seen as separate and different from large investor driven business. While by their nature they do not have a uniform set of values ascribed to them, they are perhaps more similar to co-operatives than they are to investor driven businesses in that they are not created for the sole purpose of maximizing the rate of return on shareholder capital. Like co-operatives, small (often family businesses) tend to be run for varied or multiple 'bottom lines.' Unlike co-operatives they do not have a set of values and principles to which they subscribe by choosing and incorporating in the co-operative business form.

Small business co-operatives come in various types including co-operatives of primary producers like farmers and fishers, crafts people and other kinds of small and medium sized businesses. This latter group, often called purchasing co-operatives, includes retailers of various types, motels, auto service centers and even university fraternities. While grouping them together with crafts people, fishers and farmers may seem heresy to some co-operators, they are all essentially small and medium sized businesses trying to survive in a world where the global economy is increasingly dominated by huge investor-owned corporations where the investors' only connection to the business is their investment. Today's family farms or modern fishing boats and gear, with capital investment in the millions, differ less from a family-owned True Value Hardware or Best Western Hotel than it does from either a worker or consumer owned co-operative. Both hire workers who are not members of the co-operative. Both are being squeezed by much larger investor players and use co-operation to market, purchase and to develop of other common services. Some may argue that many 'purchasing co-ops' know little about co-operative values, principles and practice. That indeed may or may not be true, but a similar statement could be made about a significant number of credit unions, farmer or other co-ops. There are also purchasing co-operatives where the co-operation business form is understood and valued.

Producer co-operative members are primary producers of farm products, fish or lumber who operate most commonly as family businesses. While this type of primary production has been the bedrock of many societies, family units of primary production are under enormous pressure from industrial primary producers. Some types of primary

products, such as metals or coal have almost always been produced by large capital driven businesses. Traditionally, however, fishing, farming and the harvesting of wood have had a strong or even pervasive family business presence. That presence has been under 'threat' and strong pressure from capital-based businesses that either sought to engage directly in primary production themselves or used their economic power to get primary products at prices that decreased the return to farmers and fishers and increased the return to capital based industry. One of the most effective tools used by farmers, fishers and wood producers, to balance the power of capital based business that bought from them, was to form co-operatives to process and/or market their products. The nature of their relationship to their co-operative differs fundamentally from the consumer relationships to their co-operatives and less so but still significantly, from worker co-operatives.

While workers in virtually every country in the English-speaking world have come together to form co-operatives, the dictum "The Consumer is King", successfully promoted by the Fabian socialists Sydney Webb and Beatrice Potter (Webb 1920) among others, has remained at the core of English-speaking co-operative thought. In many non-English speaking countries, most notably the Basque Country and the Emilia Romagna region of Italy, the development of worker co-operatives has not been hobbled by this conceptual barrier.

Applying the Values and Principles

To look at the implications of values and principles to stakeholders within co-operatives and among different types of co-operatives is a daunting task. What is laid out below is offered as an initial set of reflections to be refined and expanded upon over time, hopefully with the comments and insights of others studying co-operation and of those involved in its daily practice as well. I have drawn the base for the co-operative values and principles from the International Co-operative Alliance's Statement on the Co-operative Identity adopted in 1995 and still current on their website (2006).

To begin this exploration some comments on the co-operative values and principles are perhaps in order. Let me begin by expressing a debt to my friend and colleague Dr. Sydney Pobihushchy. I cannot possibly convey by means of footnotes or references the debt my own thinking has been influenced by his depth of thought and persistent, even relentless, reflection on co-operation and the values and principles that underlie it. While I must take responsibility for what appears below, I must acknowledge that any of the clarity and many of the insights are the result of countless demanding conversations with Dr. Pobihushchy. It is perhaps fitting then to enter into reflections about the values and principles with one of his cautions. "Each one of the ten co-operative values is a sophisticated and complex concept. Any brief definition of each of those ten values is not likely to adequately convey the complexity of the value." (Pobihushchy, 2002)

It is also worth noting that the meaning of each value is often enriched by the others included in the list. The values are interconnected and they also guide the interpretation and enrich the meaning of the principles. They are a set where, as with much else in life,

the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Thus democracy does not just mean one member one vote. Openness, honesty, equity and equality all have implications for the richness of meaning of democracy. It does not seem logically possible to consider either the values or principles in isolation.

Co-operatives emerged in response to the excesses of the industrial revolution. Co-operative pioneers developed a set of co-operative values and principles designed to shape and guide the structures and processes of co-operative businesses and to guide co-operators in their relationships with each other and the world around them. These values and principles form the touchstones for co-operative practice. It can also be argued that given the time over which the principles have evolved that they represent the best of human nature. They flow from a profound belief that people are fundamentally good and that respect for their dignity is expressed by values that are consistent with it. This profound respect for human dignity offers the co-operative form a source of support from all stakeholders to the extent that co-operatives actions are in line with their values.

These values and principles have evolved over the years since they were first developed as the co-operative business alternative emerged as an alternative to the many excesses of the industrial revolution. All co-operatives and co-operators around the globe are united by their acceptance of the International Co-operative Alliance statement of values and principles.

The comments below are driven by the question, 'Does this value or principle have significant implications for the relationships between stakeholders or between different types of co-operatives?'

Co-operative Values

Mutual Self-Help

The co-operative value of mutual self-help posits that people are interdependent and benefit from joining their individual efforts with others to achieve their aspirations and improve their lives. It rests not just on the belief that each person benefits materially more if we co-operate, but the notion that we are interdependent and that we can best achieve, and perhaps only achieve our fulfillment and meaning as human beings in the context of communities of our fellows.

A primary feature of the relationship between these key stakeholders is interdependence. Farmers and crafts people, fishers and hotel owners alike need consumers to survive. That said small business and consumer-owned co-operatives, unless they are very small and can function with volunteer work, hire workers to carry out the business of their co-operative. Worker-owned co-ops often use the products of small businesses not just in their daily lives but in their businesses as well. Individual members of humanity, all but the most isolated hermit, depend on others for their survival and enjoyment of their lives and their economic livelihood. More than that, they depend upon each other for their meaning and sense of self-value.

These notions of interdependence and mutual self-help are as much spiritual and cultural as material. It would benefit a farmer little if s/he managed a high level of material wealth but lived in a society where others lived in abject poverty. Not only would the result be social tension but, it would eat away at the basic self-image of the farmer as a 'good' person. The same might be said of other stakeholders. In this context, acting with respect for interdependence and mutual self-help both within and among stakeholder groups contributes to material, spiritual and social wellbeing.

Equality

The co-operative value of equality states that every person is worthwhile in his or her own right and has the right to have his or her life, dignity and abilities respected and valued equally. This value raises clear questions about the relations between stakeholders. Is the relationship between, for example, the members of a consumer or farm co-operative one of equals? Under what conditions, might the relationship between managers and workers, be a relationship of equals? Clearly equality does not mean that everyone has the same intelligence, skills, physical and mental health or gift of a loving family. That assumed, is an organizational structure that takes the interests of consumers as more important than that of workers, one that promotes equality? This question is all the more important when one considers that the stake of an individual worker is almost always very much higher than the stake of the individual consumer.

Equity

This value states a person should be treated fairly, and have access to all that is necessary to live a meaningful and productive life. While related to equality, equity is much different. Consider a teacher instructing a class made up of half people who are deaf and half who are blind. They would be treated equally if everything was written on the board and the teacher never spoke but there would be no equity. Equity has to do with access. All the students are equal but treating them equitably would lead to serious inequity. Equity as well has profound implications for stakeholder relationships.

Pobihushchy makes the following observations about equity: "This value has two distinct but related meanings. One meaning of this value is as an **end**. The other meaning is that of a **means** to that **end**. Equity as an END refers to FAIRNESS in the relationships between and among individuals and the manner with which authority is exercised over persons. Equity as a MEANS refers to the ownership of property/assets with which persons can protect themselves against exploitation by others, mainly corporate interests." (Pobihushchy, 2002) While Pobihushchy notes 'mainly corporate interests' it is nevertheless clear that the equity he talks about would clearly have implications for relations among stakeholders within a co-operative and among differing types of co-operatives.

Self-responsibility

Under this value each of us is responsible for our own actions and the impact of those actions upon others and ourselves. Groups are also responsible for the impact of their

actions on individuals, other groups and society in general. This clearly has strong implications for how workers, consumers and small business people co-operate within their co-operatives and among co-operatives focused on their interests. The members, board and management individually and collectively have a responsibility not only for pursuing their own interests but, are responsible for how their individual and collective actions impact other stakeholders. It may even be argued that while the implication of their actions might often be difficult at times to recognize or understand, the impacts on key stakeholders are proximate and clear and therefore a significant responsibility.

Democracy

The human spirit is liberated, by democratic processes and structures, through which control is shared, and each person shares in the ability to influence decisions. Every person has the right to have a say and influence all decisions that affect their lives. Democracy is not limited to the actions of the state but extends to all significant decisions that have an impact on the lives of people.

Clearly the most demanding aspect of this principle as it applies to co-operative business is the need for co-operatives to be attentive to the ability of people to influence all decisions that affect their lives. It seems reasonable that in making decisions one might reasonably stipulate that a co-operative would want to identify those decisions that are significant with attention to the impacts on key stakeholders of the co-operative. Surely one can argue, with solid grounds, that making provision for allowing people to influence the minor impact of trivial decisions is not realistic, but; what of decisions with regard to workplace safety in a consumer or small business co-operative? What about decisions in a worker-owned co-operative related to product safety? What about decisions related to whether farmers get a fair price for their products? These raise compelling questions for the application of democracy both in terms of stakeholder relations within a co-operative and among different types of single stakeholder co-operatives.

Solidarity

Shared, coordinated action between individuals and groups is the best way to create a society and economy characterized by equity, equality and mutual self-help. After participating in an open democratic process to determine a position or course of action members support it. Solidarity limits our individual freedom, only to the extent required by a real respect for the dignity of others being equal to our own.

Solidarity implies that co-operators will make provision for both shared coordinated action and the decisions that emerge from such action. This value also raises serious implications for single stakeholder co-operatives in both internal and external stakeholder relations.

Personal Ethical Values for Co-operators

These are values that are logical extensions of the co-operative values. Without seeking to live by these values, co-operators would not be able to nurture strong co-operatives.

Honesty

Reliable honest dealings with members, customers, suppliers and the community rest on an appreciation for the dignity of people and are a key foundation of trust. It is difficult to imagine the circumstances under which this value might be abandoned in relationships between stakeholders either within a co-operative or among co-operatives dealing with each other.

Openness

Honesty reaches full meaning only with the open disclosure of information about products and services, the way they are organized and presented, and the operations and governance of the business. Openness is also the foundation of equitable access to participation. The same comments one would make in relation to honesty would seem to apply to openness especially given how the two values so closely relate to each other.

Social Responsibility

The interdependence of people and recognition of their dignity leads to a realization that individual and group action has profound effects on individuals, groups and their relationships. If self-responsibility calls for co-operators to be responsible for the impact of their actions on other individuals and groups the personal value of social responsibility seem to flow logically. It would seem less than logical to exempt stakeholder relations and especially key stakeholder relations, either within a co-operative or among single stakeholder co-operators, from this value.

Caring for Others

Caring implies not just charity but active concern about how to act and create structures so as to enable others to realize their potential and live full and satisfying lives. Surely one of the hallmarks of co-operative business action is the characteristic of justice. People create co-operatives to ensure that they can provide for their needs in a manner whose outcomes will not require them to acquire basic needs through charity. Caring, in the presence of other co-operative values such as social responsibility, has to include consideration as to whether or not actions and structures enable others. Again, it is difficult to imagine the exclusion of stakeholders within a co-operative or the relations with other single stakeholder co-operatives as exempt and indeed logical that they might claim a place of some priority.

Co-operative Principles

The seven Co-operative Principles are operational guidelines as to how these values can be put into practice. They exist to help us organize how the co-operative operates and set standards by which they can assess their achievements and make decisions.

Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination. Different types of co-operatives, and subtypes within the main categories, offer differing services. It is interesting to note that in a worker owned co-operative the 'service' provided to the workers is productive work that provided an outlet for creativity, an opportunity to contribute to meeting the needs of other individuals and community, and a source of income. It seems very clear that this is a very important service that plays several significant roles in the lives of the co-operative's workers.

Consumer and small business co-operatives also employ people. Yet, when we consider the services they provide, we ignore their very important role in providing not only their 'core service' (financial services, electricity, housing, funerals, etc.) but providing their workers with an outlet for creativity, contributing to community and a source of income. Is the work provided more important to the worker in the worker co-operative than the worker in the consumer co-operative? The answer clearly is no. A worker may join a consumer co-operative as a 'consumer' to discuss the consumer policies but consumer or small business co-ops are not open to workers to join as workers to discuss issues around rates of pay, health and safety or benefits. Indeed, as consumer members they may or may not be able to enjoy the full privileges of membership such as becoming a member of the board either by their co-operative's policy or by legislation. In credit unions workers are prevented by legislation in most jurisdictions, from sitting on the board. The 'worker member' of the 'standard' consumer co-operative receives two services from the co-op, financial services and employment. One, employment, is clearly more important to his/her life. That said they have no membership open to them that allows them to influence the most important service they receive from the co-operative. Are they then truly *open to all members able to use their services*? There seems to be, at the very least, room for a thoughtful discussion.

The case of small business co-operatives is often even more problematic in terms of their workers. For crafts co-ops and some others there may be no hired workers. For most, whether farmers, fishers or motels, there are hired workers. These workers do not have any membership open to them. It is not impossible to imagine small business co-operatives converting themselves to worker owned co-ops but for many varied economic and historical reasons this is often unlikely. It is also very easy to understand the situation of a farmer, whose farm has passed from one generation to the next, being very uncomfortable at the thought of turning the family farm into a worker co-operative. At the very least this adoption of co-operative values at one level of operation, the relationships among small business owners, but not to the level of workers employed by small business owners, calls for reflection around the principle of open membership. It is clear that there will be no simple answers and that rigid positions will not be useful. It is clear that it is a touchy issue calling forth the full range of values and principles to

explore. It also seems clear that it would stretch co-operative values and principles to not have open honest discussions exploring the issues.

Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner. While the notion of democracy laid out in the values has implications for stakeholder relations, the principle does not seem to have profound implications.

Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. Each person should have the same access to ownership. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership. This principle links membership to both the use of the services of the co-operative and a share in the ownership capital.

Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy. This principle does not have significant implications for stakeholder relations.

Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of co-operation. The provision of education for managers and employees has some potential to raise issues related to stakeholders. A worker, upon learning the meaning of the co-operative values and principles might well reflect on how those values apply to their relationship to a consumer or small business co-operative. In the process it would seem likely that they would question the management style, benefits, salary, safety as they would in any other business but would do so with the values and principles as a viewing lens. If the co-operative, would benefit from their knowledge of the values and principles it would seem likely that it would benefit more if the values and principles were applied to stakeholder relations with the same rigor as to other aspects of the business.

It might also be argued that, in many respects and circumstances, the members perception of the co-operative is shaped more by the workers than by the board. The cashier and the milk truck driver meet many more members in a day than members of the board or management meet in a week or perhaps even a month. In many cases an attempt to create a 'co-operative brand' based on a co-operative difference must deal with the reality that the workers in the co-op are the brand.

Cooperation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures. This principle clearly has profound implications for stakeholder relations where co-operatives are organized on a single stakeholder basis. It is of interest that second tier co-operatives, owned by co-operatives rather than individual members, like Co-op Atlantic, which include multiple stakeholders such as farmers and consumers offer a strong vehicle for respecting the principle. In Co-op Atlantic consumer and farmer interests have created brands (Atlantic Tender Beef, Atlantic Tender Pork and Atlantic Tender Chicken) that are promoted in member consumer co-operatives. The livestock for these brands are produced by farmer co-operatives or members of farmer co-operatives. The wholesale, Co-op Atlantic, and the beef farmers co-operative are partners in a slaughter house to process the products. Consumers gain by having a product that is hormone free, traceable and fed on feed free from animal by products. Aided by a multi-stakeholder common central the interests of farmers and consumers are furthered through co-operation among co-operatives characterized by mutual self-help.

Concern for Community

While focusing on member needs, co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members. Small business, consumers and workers all have a stake in healthy, socially sound and viable communities. Co-operatives that act in ways that undermine this principle not only harm their own members but other stakeholders as well.

Conclusions

The above suggests that all of the Co-operative Values are relevant in exploring the relationship among stakeholders within a co-operative and among single stakeholder co-operatives. Serious issues are raised in terms of mutual self-help, equality, equity, self-responsibility, democracy and solidarity. Similarly, the personal values adopted to guide the behavior of co-operators, honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others, all have significant implications for stakeholder relations.

Multi Stakeholder Model

For the purposes of this part of the discussion the focus will be framed in term of the relationship between worker stakeholders and consumer stakeholders in a consumer co-operative. The same case could be made for workers and owners in a small business co-operative and a similar case for the relationship between producers and consumers.

This exploration raises serious issues faced by single stakeholder co-operatives both in terms of how they are able to apply co-operative values and principles to stakeholder relationships within their co-operatives and with external stakeholders and co-operatives created by those single stakeholders. It would seem difficult and perhaps impossible for a consumer co-operative to have the co-operative values inform their business fully if they are not able to participate in a relationship with their worker stakeholders as equals. What would have to be done for such an unequal relationship to reflect openness, honesty and mutual self-help? Observers of co-operatives would in all likelihood note that some consumer co-operatives do significantly better than others in applying co-operative values to how they relate to their workers. But the 'bottom line' in a consumer co-op is that it is the consumers who are applying the values to the relationship. They own the co-operative. The single stakeholder structure increases the likelihood that the worker consumer relationship will be confrontational or adversarial rather than co-operative.

During a visit to the Mondragon co-operative system in 1984 the author asked how, with one half the board made up of workers and half of consumers, they would be able to function as a board when the workers had to leave the room because of their conflict of interest during any discussion of salaries, benefits or working conditions. The chair of the board asked in response if the consumer board members of my co-operative left the room when prices were discussed. He continued, "There are two ways to solve problems. You can solve them on the table or under the table. We find it is better to solve them on the table as colleagues." (Webb, 1984)

The Weaver Street Market in Carrboro North Carolina is another example of the multi-stakeholder model. Half the board is made up of workers, half of consumers. During a recent visit the author asked Weaver Street CEO Ruffin Slater if worker consumer tension had ever led to a stalemate. The response was, "not yet". Slater admitted that there were tensions as a result of differing interests, but that over the years, they had managed to solve problems without any deep split. (Webb, 2006)

This suggests that the multi-stakeholder model offers considerable scope to permit co-operators to more fully implement their values and principles than the single stakeholder model. The Co-op Atlantic example noted above would seem to corroborate this tentative conclusion. The Weaver Street experience also seems to support the same position that, carried out well, multi stakeholder co-operatives may well provide a more conducive structure to put co-operative values and principles into practice. Clearly this is an area that would benefit from additional research.

Clearly the demands created by the co-operative values and principles are daunting and complex. This can be viewed as a burden of co-operative business, or a recognition of reality. Providing for our needs, in ways that do not harm either ourselves or others is a daunting task. The co-operative form of business simply provides a well thought out, time tested vehicle for achieving that result. Co-operative business can be seen as a value added from of meeting our needs that embodies multiple bottom lines in a coherent tested manner.

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