ENTREPRENEURIAL INTERNAL CONDITIONS IN COOPERATIVE FIRMS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract

Firms and organizations operate in a dynamic and competitive environment, which drives many of them to foster organizational conditions that reinforce the commitment of their members together with the implementation of innovative and entrepreneurial actions. These organizational conditions, understood as the set of practices, values, and beliefs perceived by the organization's members, influence business performance and the entrepreneurial attitude, the latter being understood as the search for, identification, and exploitation of new business opportunities. However, if staff perceptions are not correct and conditions are not correctly identified, they can generate difficulties in the management and well-being of employees. This paper focuses on the case of cooperative enterprises and aims to analyze the relevance of entrepreneurial organizational conditions in this type of entity. To this end, a sample of 132 cooperatives is examined, and key perceived factors such as managerial support, labor autonomy, reward system, and time availability are studied. The results show that these conditions can positively impact the organization.

Palabras clave: cooperatives, entrepreneurial internal conditions, pro-entrepreneurial organizational structure, social economy, organizational climate.

INTRODUCTION

Today's firms and organizations face an uncertain and dynamic environment characterized by a high degree of market globalization, the constant evolution of technology, and a continuous increase in competitiveness (Agirre-Aramburu et al., 2023). For this reason, some companies respond to this context by favoring the generation of an organizational climate conducive to their staff's commitment and innovative effort (Kreiser et al., 2021) to identify and exploit new business opportunities (Datta et al., 2020).

Therefore, the reality of organizational climate is not new in the scientific literature. Pritchard & Karasick (1973) pointed out the influence of the environment on people's behavior, highlighting how this is a relatively lasting feature in companies and organizations characterized by being the result of the behavior and policies implemented by the members of the organization, especially in the case of managers and senior management personnel, and must be perceived by the staff in such a way that it serves as a basis for the correct interpretation of the context and acts as a source of pressure when directing the activity.

Señalan Banwo et al. (2022) point out that organizational climate can be defined as the set of practices, procedures, beliefs, and values that the members of an organization perceive, resulting in a favorable or unfavorable environment for them (Chijere, 2024) and that it can become a determining factor in the direction of the behaviors of the members of a company or organization (Wang & Xiao, 2021).
Nonetheless, the perceptions of the members of the staff of firms and organizations about the organizational climate can have a multifaceted character. Suppose they are not correctly identified by their managers and directors. In that case, they can lead to complex problems in the management of the people in the organization and the well-being of these people (Banwo et al., 2022).

The organizational climate of a firm or organization, represented through the commitment of its members (Lu et al., 2023), will influence its performance, which in many cases is a variable relationship subject to a wide variety of actions and practices in the business context (Agirre-Aramburu et al., 2023). The search will, in turn, condition this performance for and identification of market opportunities capable of generating business thanks to their entrepreneurial attitude (Kuratko et al., 2023). Thus, Rogalska (2019) highlights how, in the case of organizational conditions, those of an entrepreneurial nature will be one of the most essential elements for the company to experience sustainable growth.

Organizations wishing to adopt an entrepreneurial attitude should not think of establishing the organizational conditions for entrepreneurship partially. Still, they should do so in its entirety so that the organizational background positively impacts this attitude (Baena-Luna et al., 2025). In this respect, it is crucial to bear in mind that the entrepreneurial organizational conditions of a company should not only be measured concerning the possible support of the company to its staff but also that this support should be perceived by its members (Bergmann et al., 2024). As Goldsby et al. (2024) note, internal entrepreneurial conditions are not a single organizational form but rather an internal environment with specific characteristics and attributes that, individually and collectively, favor entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors on the part of the company and that its managers must also be aware of (Alam & Bhowmick, 2023).

The relevance of investigating organizational conditions from an entrepreneurial perspective is justified by the fact that despite all the research in recent years on the entrepreneurial phenomenon, the entrepreneurial attitude in the case of firms continues to be the focus of researchers from different disciplines and areas of knowledge (Román-Calderón et al., 2023). Consequently, the organizational context undoubtedly influences the entrepreneurial attitude of the firm (Bergmann et al., 2024), and it is necessary to know and study this in all its dimensions to ensure this potential positive impact on the innovative actions of the organization or the firms (Vu et al., 2024).

The aim of this paper, hence, aligned with the need to deepen the organizational conditions in the field of enterprises and organizations, is to analyze, in the case of a sample of 132 social economy enterprises (cooperatives), the relevance and behavior of the variables contemplated in the "Entrepreneurial Climate" construct of Kreiser et al. (2021) that measures Entrepreneurial Internal Conditions through:

a) Management Support, b) Work discretion, c) Rewards/reinforcement, d) Time availability.

Following this introduction, the rest of the paper is organized as follows: The second section presents the literature review with the concepts and realities related to the object of study. The third section provides the methodology, including relevant sample and data treatment information. The fourth section presents the results obtained. The fifth section analyzes these results and compares them with related studies. This section also discusses the practical and theoretical implications and limitations and recommends future research from this work. Finally, the sixth section presents the most relevant conclusions.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Organizational climate

Recent definitions operationalize organizational climate as the set of shared perceptions, meanings that individuals attribute to the series of experiences that occur at work and that are interpreted as the social fabric of organizational climates, and processes that prevail daily and that are therefore capable of promoting social interactions by sharing knowledge and experiences among the members of a firm or organization (Kim & Park, 2020). In this regard, these definitions are not so different from what Dess & Picken (1999) have already pointed out, which concerning the reality of organizational climate focused on the fact that it is mainly a system of shared values and beliefs that give shape to larger structures capable of generating certain behaviors among the members of an organization.

It is crucial to bear in mind that, to speak of a specific organizational climate, it must arise from the fact that the members of the firm or organization are exposed to and subject to similar rules, procedures, and routines (Banwo et al., 2022). Knowing the climate in an organization is relevant since it affects how shared meaning is created and, therefore, people's behavior. This is so because, as Bergmann et al. (2024) point out, it has been shown that there is a direct relationship between organizational climate and potentially essential results at both the individual and group levels of an organization or firm.

The internal climate can be critical in achieving business objectives and influences different areas (Akrong et al., 2022). Organizational climate, as well as its impact, is also influenced, in particular by the behavior of its members, and can be a predictor of the predisposition of the organization's members to remain in it (Hossny et al., 2023).

The organization's members' perception of the organizational climate will be based on their interaction, thanks to sufficient knowledge about the procedures, policies, values, and practices implemented (Zafar et al., 2023). This means that organizational climate is somewhat flexible and varies from one organization to another, so no single set of characteristics can be established (Akrong et al., 2022).

1.2 Entrepreneurial internal conditions

The multidimensional nature of entrepreneurship makes it a reality permeated by different factors. So much so that demographic, ethnic, organizational, institutional, socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural elements can be identified in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Kuratko & Morris, 2018), both at the level of individuals and of the firms and organizations themselves (Baena-Luna et al., 2021). In the case of organizations, one of the most immediate consequences of the fact that entrepreneurial internal conditions are present and fostered in these organizations is to favor the achievement of their entrepreneurial strategy (Khalil et al., 2022).

The first references to concepts related to the entrepreneurial conditions of firms and organizations are found in Hornsby et al. (2002), who, in the development of their "corporate entrepreneurship assessing instrument" (CEAI), highlight the existence of organizational factors of an entrepreneurial nature which, as already pointed out by Burgelman (1983b, 1983a) will influence the activities carried out by the firms.

An internal organizational structure that favors entrepreneurship both in the behavior of its members and in the organization itself in the search for and identification of new business opportunities is directly connected to the presence of some attributes such as organizational culture and values, available resources, systems, etc. (Ireland et al., 2003), although it is true that research on the internal factors that favor these entrepreneurial organizational conditions is still limited (Baena-Luna et al., 2025; Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016).

As Hornsby et al. (2013) point out, we must not forget that to speak of entrepreneurial firms and organizations, entrepreneurial behaviors of all members and at all levels are necessary, and this is only possible in a favorable internal context in which these behaviors find the support, recognition, etc., they need.

In this regard, Kreiser et al. (2021), taking as a basis the CEAI of Hornsby et al. (2002), establish that the following dimensions should be analyzed to determine the existence of entrepreneurial organizational conditions:

a) Management Support. This dimension refers to the level or degree to which the personnel of the firms or organizations perceive that the managers and directors support, facilitate, and promote the implementation of entrepreneurial behavior.

b) Work discretion. In this case, the study of this dimension measures how people perceive that the organization provides them with sufficient freedom in the different decision-making processes and that they are freed from excessive supervision.

c) Recognition and rewards. Support is essential, and recognition and possible rewards for achievements are necessary. This dimension analyzes how people perceive that their successful behaviors for the firm or the organization are adequately recognized and rewarded.

d) Time availability. This dimension considers and measures the extent to which the possible workloads allow individuals and work groups to have time to investigate and inquire about potential innovations applicable to the organization.

High levels in these dimensions are undoubtedly constitutive of a high perceived level of entrepreneurial organizational conditions by the members that make up a firm or organization (Baena-Luna et al., 2025; Kearney & Meynhardt, 2016) and is in line with Ireland et al. (2009) who pointed out that entrepreneurial organizational conditions do not exist in a unique form. Still, instead, they are established as an internal context in the organization in such a way that they favor the implementation of entrepreneurial behaviors.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sample

Our study population is made up of cooperative firms. This legal form is recognized as one of the main ones within the social economy. It is an emerging sector with a significant impact and presence worldwide(Takahashi et al., 2014). The sample was

taken from the report *"Empresas Relevantes de la Economía Social"* of the Spanish Business Confederation of the Social Economy (CEPES), from which 674 with at least 50 employees were selected. Finally, 132 firms responded to our request.
Of the 132 firms, the majority belong to the agriculture and livestock sector (45%), followed by the industry and energy sector (12%). The predominant profile of the respondents is male (78%), aged between 51 and 60 years (47%), holding managerial positions (34%), and with a length of service in the firm between 11 and 20 years (46%), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics by sector.

Sector of activity (NACE)	Frecuency	(%)
Agriculture and livestock	64	48.47
Industry and energy	16	12.12
Construction	14	10.61
Health activities	13	9.85
Services	11	8.33
Education	5	3.79
Trade and commerce	3	2.27
Telecomunication	2	1.52
Financial activities	2	1.52
Other	2	1.52
TOTAL	132	100%

Note: NACE, statistical nomenclature of economic activities (Eurostat, 2008).

The profile of the respondents to the questionnaire from the cooperatives is male (78%), between 51 and 60 years old (47%), and have been with the firm for between 11 and 20 years (46%), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of survey respondents.

Category		Frequency	(%)
Age	30 ≤ to < 40	6	4.50
	41 ≤ to < 50	47	35.60
	51 ≤ to < 60	62	47.00
	≥ 60	17	12.90
		132	100%
Gender	Male	104	78.80
	Female	28	21.20
		132	100%
Years in the firm	≤ 10	32	24.20
	11 ≤ to < 20	61	46.20
	21 ≤ to < 30	32	24.20
	≥ 31	7	5.,40
		132	100%

2.2. Data processing

The methodology involves, firstly, the reliability analysis of the variables to investigate their suitability for measuring the concept of inappropriateness. Secondly, multivariate analysis is used to illustrate how the groups are created according to the behavior of the organizations in the variables considered using cluster analysis. In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis test is used to analyze the variables that cause significant differences between the groups. The methods used are also based on descriptive statistics and reliability analysis.

Cluster analysis is proposed to observe how cooperative firms can be grouped according to their behavioral variables and to identify common patterns. This approach has been used in previous studies because it easily identifies a group of units with similar characteristics according to the phenomena measured (Crum et al., 2022). This is a multivariate method whose main objective is clustering. It is a widespread statistical technique in which a set of objects (e.g., events, people) is subdivided into groups (clusters) in such a way that objects in the same group are more similar (based on certain variables) to each other than to those belonging to different groups (Del Chiappa et al., 2018).

A hierarchical cluster analysis was applied using Ward's method. This method was used because of its ability to minimize differences within clusters. All the variables in this method are used to determine the distance between clusters. In addition, the sum of squares within the cluster is minimized at each step of the clustering process (Hair et al., 1998). The squared Euclidean distance was used as a measure, as suggested in the specialized literature when using Ward's method.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (C-alpha) was analyzed to determine the internality of the database since it allows an assessment of the extent to which it measures a single unidimensional object. C-alpha is not a statistical test but a reliability coefficient based on the correlation between individual indicators. A high correlation indicates that individual indicators measure the same underlying construct. Therefore, a high c-alpha, or high reliability, suggests that the individual indicators have correctly measured the latent phenomenon (George & Mallery, 2003).

3. RESULTS

The results reveal a high reliability of the variables included in each dimension to measure the concept analyzed. Six well-defined groups have been obtained, with few differences between them. Company size and sector are the variables that most influence the grouping. The error bars (Figure 3) allow us to identify the behavior of the clusters for each variable. Size is related to Management Support; Sector is correlated with Management Support and Time Availability, while firm age is strongly associated with all four variables. Consequently, age is one of the most representative aspects to be considered when studying the Organizational Business Conditions in cooperative enterprises.

Concerning the results of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, the results reveal that the items established to evaluate Management Support (α=0.865), Job Discretion (α=0.885), Rewards/Reinforcement (α=0.861), and Time Availability (α=0.720) are all consistent in measuring the attributes that individually and collectively favor entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors on the part of the company. Meanwhile, globally, the overall consistency of the survey was (α=0.927). Consequently, it is entirely valid for investigating the Internal Entrepreneurial Conditions of the firms (Oláh et al., 2022).

The mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation of the dimensions considered are presented in Table 3. According to these results, all means are representative, with coefficients of variation lower than 30%; that is, the data set used within each dimension is homogeneous.

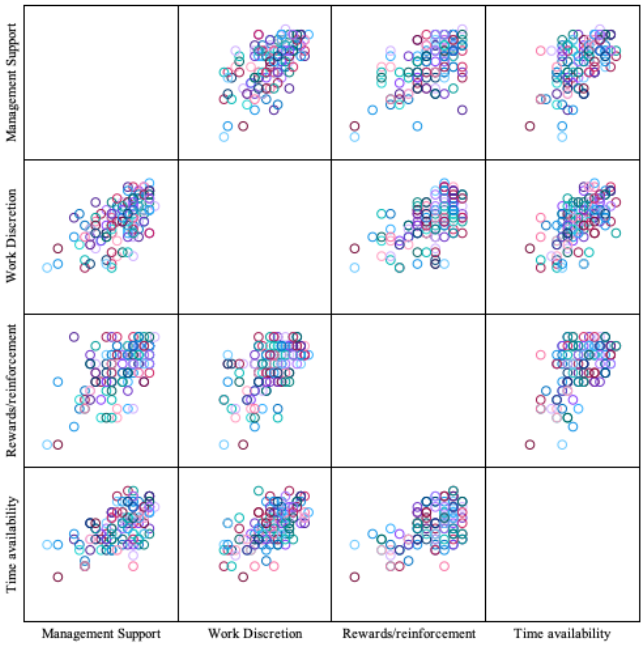
Table 3. Descriptive statistics by dimension.

	Mean	Std. Dev.	VC
Management Support	3.7318	0.82844	22.2%
Work Discretion	3.6104	0.76963	21.3%
Rewards/reinforcement	3.8536	0.87341	22.7%
Time availability	3.6818	0.6808	18.5%

Notes: Std. Dev: Standard deviation; VC: Variation Coefficient.

In such a case, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient reveals a strong relationship between the variables considered (all significant at the 0.01 level), so they share standard information (Nardo et al., 2005) and are valid for creating composite indexes. However, this is not the objective of this research. The relationship described above can be corroborated graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Scatter plots.



Cluster analysis reveals the creation of six well-defined groups, distributed according to Figure 2. The Kruskal-Wallis test shows that all indicators show significant differences between the groups, except for the size of the cooperative, which does not influence the grouping (Table 4).

Figure 2. Clusters.

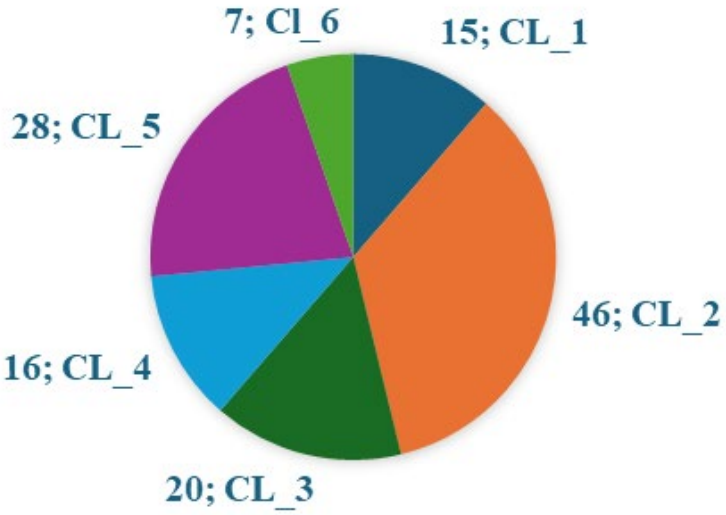


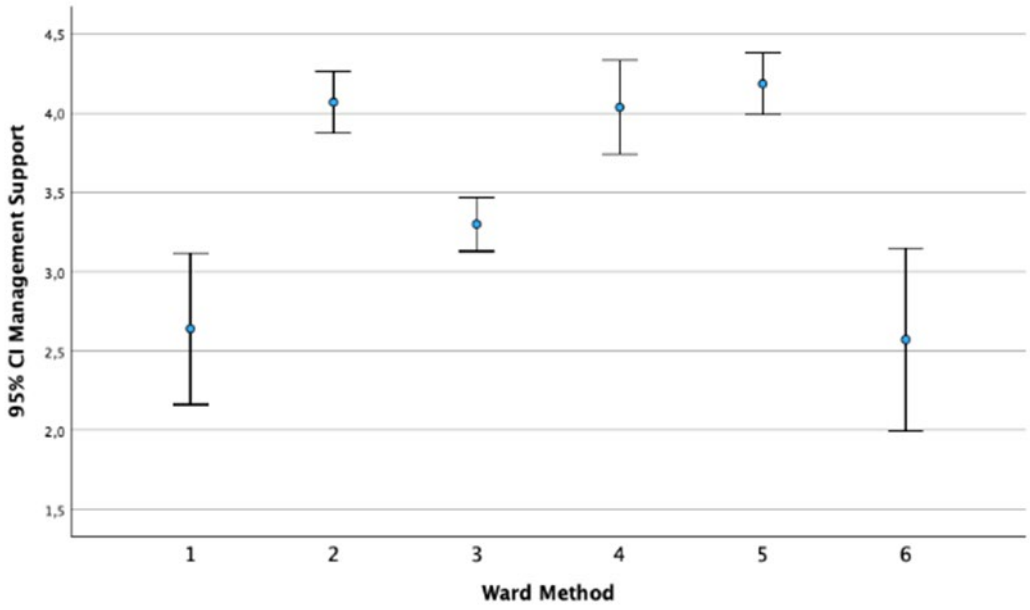
Table 4. Kruskal Wallis Test

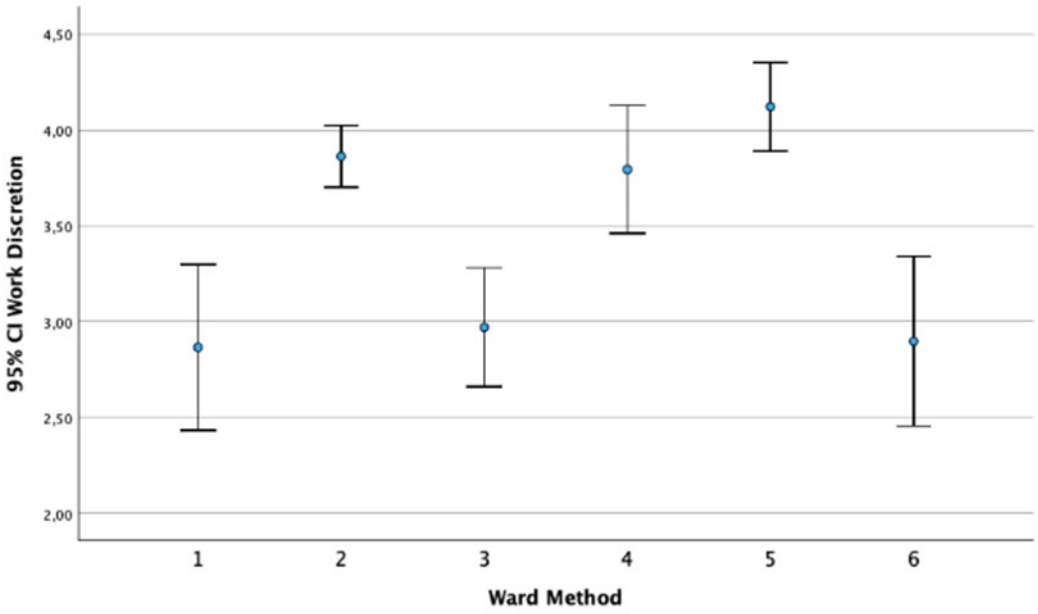
	Sector	Management Support	Work Discretion	Rewards/ Reinforcement	Time availability	Size	Age
Kruskal-Wallis H	111.798	60.120	50.504	61.316	53.313	9.01	43.783
df	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.098	<.001

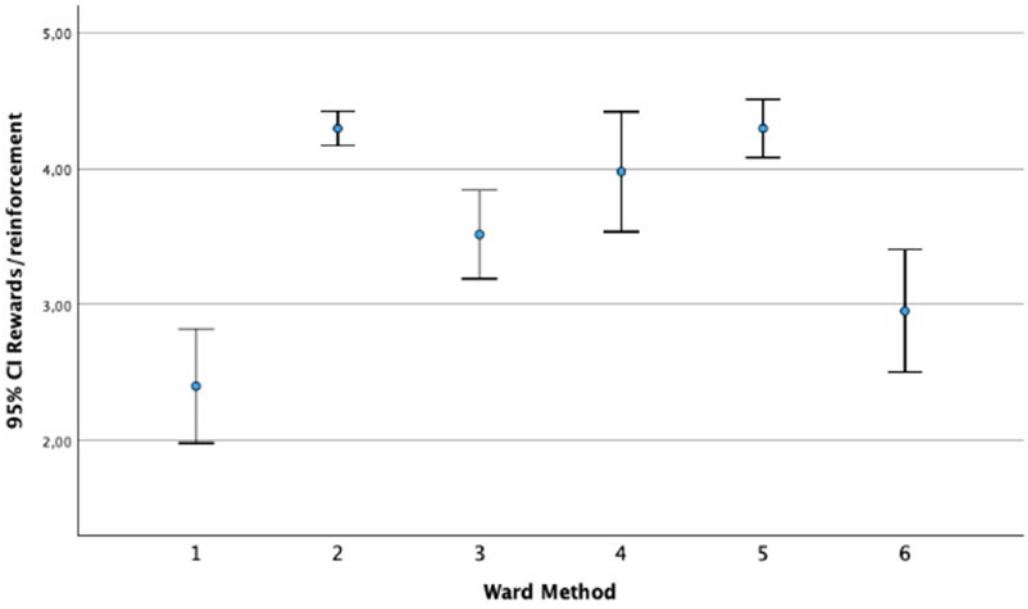
Notes: df: Degrees of freedom; Asymp. Sig: asymptotic significance. a. Kruskal Wallis Test | b. Grouping Variable: Clusters

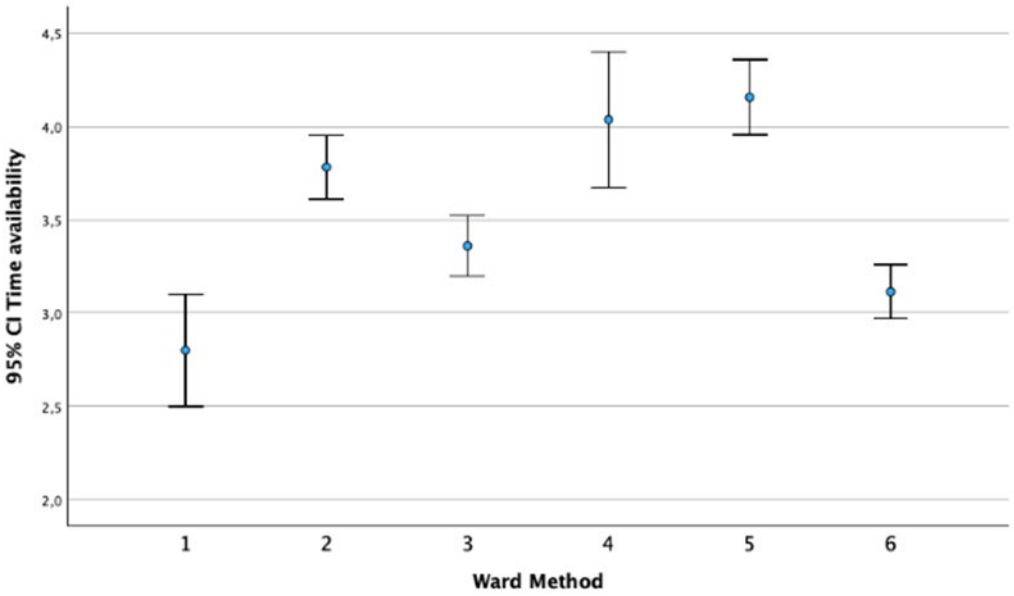
The analysis of the error bar graphs shows, with a confidence level of 95%, that there are significant differences between the groups' means in the four main variables analyzed (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Error bars for Management Support, Work Discretion, Rewards/reinforcement, and Time availability.



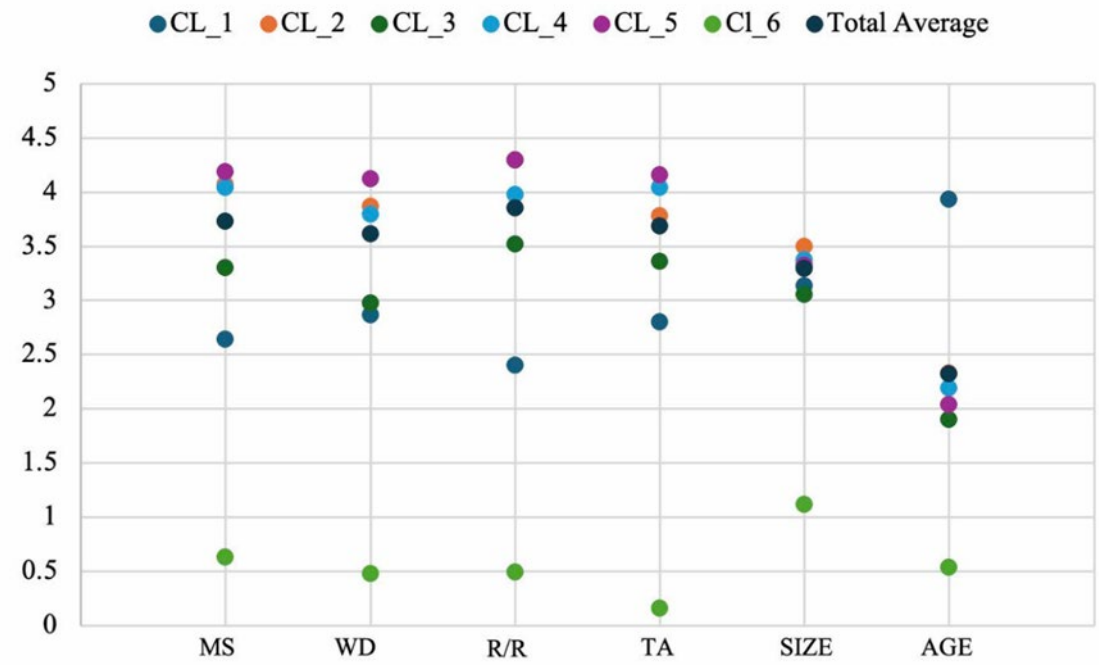

95% CI Work Discretion
4,50
4,00
3,50
3,00
2,50
2,00
1
2
3
4
5
6
Ward Method


95% CI Rewards/reinforcement
5,00
4,00
3,00
2,00
1
2
3
4
5
6
Ward Method



An in-depth analysis of the average performance of the companies in the clusters shows that the seven units grouped in the 6th cluster are, on average, the youngest and the smallest, with the lowest values in all indicators, between 4% and 17% of the sample mean. On the contrary, the 28 cooperatives grouped in the 5th cluster are the largest and have achieved the best average rating in Management Support (+12.2% of the Sample Mean), Work Discretion (+14.2%), Rewards/Reinforcement (+11.5%) and Time Availability (+12.9%). Figure 4 shows a graphical description of the behavior of each group.

Figure 4. The mean of the clusters and the sample in each indicator.



4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results derived from the processing of the data collected on the behavior of the dimensions that make up the so-called organizational conditions of an entrepreneurial nature shows how these elements can indeed be influenced. This is so because the value of these variables is not based on an absolute measure but on the perception of the members of the companies and organizations.

The contributions of this work to theory are essential because they connect two realities not addressed in the literature: entrepreneurial organizational conditions and cooperatives. Undoubtedly, this research contributes to advanced knowledge on the influence of entrepreneurial elements of firms on the performance of entrepreneurial actions within cooperatives. The results help to address some research gaps on the effect of entrepreneurial elements, as there are studies on their impact on other organizational outcomes. However, this is not the case for cooperative enterprises.

This contribution to the theory also represents an advance in science since no studies address the influence of the perceived levels of the dimensions considered in the entrepreneurial organizational climate in the case of this type of enterprise included in the social economy.

As for the practical implications, it is essential to highlight the usefulness of the results for the management of cooperative enterprises. In the case of company managers, it is evident how they can favor an organizational climate of an entrepreneurial nature and how this can result in the search for, identification, and exploitation of new business opportunities.

Promising lines of action are opening for firms concerned with improving the results derived from their entrepreneurial actions. They now have valuable information to design actions to achieve their objectives aligned and interconnectedly.

Like any research work, this study is affected by some potential limitations. Among the main ones, the following two stand out: the first refers to organizational bias: the study was carried out on a sample of a specific type of company, a cooperative. This leads us to wonder whether the contrasted result of the hypotheses put forward could be different in the case of other legal forms included in the social economy. Secondly, the population we are investigating comes from a specific geographical context (Spain). We should be cautious about generalizing and extrapolating the results to other geographical contexts.

As for possible lines of future research derived from this work, it should be noted that, given its cross-sectional nature, a longitudinal approach may be considered appropriate. Only longitudinal studies can more firmly ensure the existence of causal relationships and not only descriptive ones. Future work analyzing the results at different points would make it possible to study these possible causal relationships more precisely.

CONCLUSIONS

The most relevant conclusions derived from the analysis and discussion of the results are the following: the perceived level of the dimensions included in the organizational conditions of an entrepreneurial nature in the case of cooperatives will be influenced

by the size of the cooperative and its age. This is so that the larger the size and the more senior the cooperative, the better the values measured and, therefore, the greater the potential for a positive effect on the organizational results.

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