Convergence between performance and amateur management of a social organisation

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Abstract

Purpose – Understanding social organisations requires considerable effort because of their complex reality. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the performance and amateur form of management of an organisation of scavengers, with significant results for society.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is a qualitative in-depth case study. Data were collected through ethnographic interviews, non-participant observation and document analysis. The association of scavengers in question was identified as being strongly representative of the 23 similar associations in Curitiba. The city is the first Brazilian capital to create conditions for direct disposal of selective waste collected by waste pickers, as recommended by the National Solid Waste Policy.

Findings – Three main aspects of evidence are highlighted in the proposed model: unique features, performance management and multiplicity of practices. The findings showed a strong presence of utilitarian behaviour due to the need of the members of the organisation to generate income for survival, forcing social and environmental concerns into the background. The combination of community values, informal practices, collective learning and amateur management has had a positive effect on the social organisation's performance.

Social implications – The outcomes were identified for individuals, the community and society by contributing to social inclusion, economic growth and environmental care.

Originality/value – The differentiated approach lies in the convergence between performance and amateur management in social organisations, with relevant environmental, economic and social results. A model is proposed to demonstrate the complex relationship between unique features, multiplicity of practices and performance with regard to the amateur management analysed in this study.

Keywords Performance management, Nonprofit, Multiplicity of practices, Social organizations, Unique features

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Nonprofit organisations play an increasingly relevant role in today's society. Unlike companies that focus on market values, nonprofit organisations seek to fulfil a social mission. The aim of nonprofit institutions is to provide community or public services in accordance with a particular community-oriented mission. This means creating added value for their stakeholders and the community (Moore, 2000; Anheier, 2014). In light of this and given the well-known discrepancy between fulfilment of a social mission and the very limited resources available (Oster, 1995), management in these organisations is of particular importance.

To fulfil their purpose, nonprofits must have, like any other social organisation, resources and skills for their management. In this study, management practices were examined in an association of scavengers in the south of Brazil, along with their implications for the members, association and society. The association is in the business of selecting recovered waste from built-up areas and promoting social inclusion and environmental care.

Considering the multiplicity of practices of nonprofit organisations as a social practice will provide a better understanding of both the processes and structures of social organisations and the transformations that they have undergone. These organisations are perceived as open systems in permanent interaction with the environment, with the predominance of characteristics such as non-linearity, self-organisation and the relative autonomy of agents (Cilliers, 1998; McDaniel, 2007; Stacey, 2010).

The contribution of this study lies in the unique multiplicity of activities practised within the association of scavengers that recover recyclable waste materials. The unique and amateur way of handling their day-to-day operations is represented by individual work, sense of community, loose structure, informal relations and shared information. Significant outcomes were identified for individuals, the community and society through contributions in terms of social inclusion, the economic growth of participating families and environmental care.

The originality of the study is found in the convergence between amateur management and performance in social organisations, with relevant environmental, economic and social results. This paper highlighted, in a specific and consistent section, suggestions for future research, with questions raised in the discussion and implications for social organisations.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1 Performance of social organisations

The performance of social organisations depends on the quality of their management, which is responsible for their success or failure in a continuous change environment (Mitleton-Kelly, 2011). This context presupposes the ability to change, adapt and evolve (McDaniel, 2007; Richardson, 2011; Stacey, 2011). Regarding the performance of managers, Handy (2002) emphasised three essential roles for them: first, knowing how to deal with people; second, knowing how to solve problems; and third, knowing how to make things happen.

Despite the existence of bureaucratic rules and routines, unpredictable behaviour (Chowdary, 2001), uncertainty, unexpected events and non-linear interactions (Allen *et al.*, 2011) contribute greatly to making management a craft rather than a profession (Mintzberg, 2009a). It is the management and its practitioners that determine whether social institutions waste talents and resources or provide important services (Mintzberg, 1975). As a result, complex tasks require complex skills from managers who are mostly not well prepared technically or emotionally to face such challenges. These challenges include tensions, paradoxes, conundrums and unknown or unforeseen events that occur in the everyday life of organisations.

One way of looking at management in social organisations is to imagine that a particular organisation could achieve acceptable levels of performance, success and sustainability without the existence of a highly efficient and effective managerial systems based on bureaucratic processes. In this case, organisations would be understood as organic and flexible systems (Gorod *et al.*, 2017), in which organisations co-evolve with their mutating environments. In such systems, management combines certain levels of rationality with elements such as improvisation (Cunha *et al.*, 2003; Crossan and Sorrenti, 2002), intuition (Dane and Pratt, 2007), learning (Miner *et al.*, 2001), hunches and feelings, all of which are typical of any human system.

The main contributions of the performance of social organisations indicate the importance of formal rational plans as guides and stimulators of their main actions. These plans coexist with strategic initiatives that can be seen not only as an outgrowth of the larger institutional guidelines but, above all, as relevant effective practices in the organisation's management (Meyer *et al.*, 2012). The performance of social organisation management lies in its analytical approach to the complexity (Allen *et al.*, 2011) that arises from ambiguous, non-routine implications and the diversity of agents. As pointed out by

Johnson *et al.* (2008), the complexity of relationships is found in the specificity of the social organisation, such as the businesses, government agencies, nonprofits and communities, in which it operates.

2.2 Managing nonprofit organisations

Compared with business and governmental agencies, nonprofit organisations display some characteristics that make them unique (Worth, 2018). The purpose of nonprofit organisations is to make a difference to society (Drucker, 1990; Mendel, 2014) by providing services in a variety of areas such as education, religion, low-income housing, health care, the environment, community, civil rights, the arts and culture. Nonprofit organisations consist of multiple components and internal federations or coalitions among stakeholders (Anheier, 2014), which make them a major managerial challenge. This challenge lies in the convergence of stakeholders' expectations (Jarzabkowski and Fenton, 2006), financial sustainability (Orlitzky *et al.*, 2003) and the fulfilment of the social mission (Moore, 2000).

The structure of nonprofit organisations may require a "multi-faceted, flexible approach to management and not the use of singular, ready-made models carried over from the business world or from public management" (Anheier, 2014, p. 328). Nonprofits are essentially missionary organisations (Mintzberg, 1991) based on a rich system of values that requires management flexibility, resulting in an inspiring and noble mission that attracts and unites devoted members. The result is a challenge to managers who need to learn how to cope with such flexibility of a loosely coupled system (Orton and Weick, 1990) as well as their impact on people's behaviour and organisational performance (Lewicki *et al.*, 1998).

Managing nonprofit organisations means being driven by a mission and relying on diverse sources of income, including private donations, government grants and the organisation's own income from services. The main role of managers is to balance the fulfilment of their mission and the sustainability of these organisations. While the mission needs to be accomplished to reinforce their reputation, image and legitimacy in the eyes of the stakeholders, resources are needed to support their programs, projects and general operation. It is necessary to deal with disagreements, tensions and engendering a sense of ownership, as well as a desire for influence among multiple constituencies both inside and outside the walls of the organisation (Worth, 2018) to achieve better organisational performance.

Social work managers may identify the level of needs for each employee and understand that people will be motivated by the factors that exist at this level (Fisher, 2009). Their goals are derived from missions in which values, trust and legitimacy are key elements. Although some studies have also been oriented to organise different indicators of performance evaluation, focusing on social organisations and suitable for this type of organisation, a need for further research remains (Greatbanks *et al.*, 2010; Manville and Greatbanks, 2010; Bagnoli and Megali, 2011; Al-Tabbaa *et al.*, 2013).

However, as their primary objective is to benefit the community as a whole, the performance evaluation of nonprofit organisations cannot be adequately reflected using the traditional indicators intended for companies operating in a for-profit-oriented system (Manville and Greatbanks, 2010; Anheier, 2014). Multidimensional objectives, multi-stakeholder structure and the non-monetary benefits generated for the environment and society make it difficult to identify suitable indicators to evaluate performance and generated value (Drucker, 1990; Monteduro and Hinna, 2005; Manville and Greatbanks, 2010). The notion that organisations are "symbiotic systems that require commitment, participation, and common problem-solving" is also based on strong ideological foundations (Anheier, 2014, p. 145) on which indicators of nonprofits must be based to improve performance. This is an important way to manage results for the organisation and its people.

2.3 The unmanaged organisation

Management practices vary according to the characteristics of organisations and the environment in which they are inserted. Although the managerial literature indicates the predominance of rationalist approaches in managing organisations by stressing planning, (formal) structure, productivity and control, managers in nonprofit organisations operate in a different setting (Moore, 2000). Instead of using rational procedures to manage, they rely much more on experience and intuition (Dane and Pratt, 2007). Gabriel (1995, p. 477) identified within organisations "[…] a particular terrain which is not and cannot be managed". It is a particular area away from the typical bureaucratic, political and symbolic setting, and characterised by individuals being overcontrolled and oversocialised. The author refers to this area as an uncolonised terrain or the "unmanaged organisation".

Power, authority and leadership are not only a matter of goal achievement and job performance, but also a matter of personal commitment and expectations (Anheier, 2014). In this setting, people are free individually and in groups to engage in unsupervised and spontaneous activities. It is a place where desires, anxieties and emotions trigger irrational constructions and a place that deserves further attention from practitioners and researchers in the field. A more recent concept of organisations as communities has attracted the attention of practitioners and researchers. It is related to how people come together to work in harmony and in collaboration as companies, government agencies or nonprofits (AL-Tabbaa *et al.*, 2013).

Organisations are social entities, meaning that collaboration and integration of efforts among people are pivotal to their performance, success and long-term survival. Community also implies caring about work, with a sense of family and belonging, in which values and trust are shared and nurtured by the members. As Mintzberg (2009b) pointed out, however, the concept of community is easier to preserve and flourish in the nonprofit sector, with cooperatives and organisations guided by their mission. In these organisations, people are more engaged and stimulated by trust, strong culture and leadership. The call for attention to social work leadership has been echoing for several years (Wimpfheimer, 2004).

2.4 Community of practices

The concept of communities of practices cannot be viewed in isolation, but as a part of a larger framework, a social system that encompasses the relationship between a person and the world, a social person inserted in a social world (Wenger, 2003; Hatch, 2018). Thus, a community of practice can be perceived as both a simple and a complex social system. What integrates both systems is the relationship between individual and social participation, which are somehow entangled, leading to what is identified as a social learning system (Wenger, 2003; McDaniel, 2007).

Consequently, community of practices are groups of individuals with some common interests gathering in a particular place to interact, work, discuss and share knowledge and learning experiences. This reflects on how individuals do things in a particular organisational context at a specific moment in time, and how they reflect and learn based on their daily practices. Hatch (2018, p. 205) summarises the community of practice concept as a place where individuals are "doing something separately together". The concept is also identified as a setting in which an informal aggregation of individuals shares the way they do things and how they interpret events (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, according to Gherardi *et al.* (1998), a community of practice is not just a form of organising, not necessarily consensual or harmonious, but a place where individual members carry out and perpetuate a practice. In this context the emphasis is on practice, which encompasses knowledge, activity and social relations, all of them intertwined (Gherardi *et al.*, 1997, 1998).

Community of practice can also be seen as social and cultural organisation (Yanow, 2003) in which individuals practice sensemaking (Weick, 1995). It also implies the competence the

community acquires over time, as well as a subjective experience of the members regarding the organisational setting and society (Gherardi, 2006). In this way, they seek meaning by interpreting daily facts and events of organisational life, thus reducing the ambiguity (Weick, 1979) embedded in intentions, decision and actions. Practices in this context are seen as ideas, tools, frameworks, information, language and stories shared by individual members (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). All of this necessarily affects individuals, groups and the shared practices, knowledge, learning, negotiations and outcomes derived from this process in a particular setting. Thomas *et al.* (1993) pointed out significant linkages between the cognitive tasks of scanning, interpretation and action as a part of sensemaking processes in nonprofits.

The operationalization of community of practice is considered a challenge (Addicott *et al.*, 2006; Waring and Currie, 2009). In this respect, a distinct contribution to the concept of community of practice was made by Pyrko *et al.* (2016) focusing on the idea of "thinking together" – a key element that "essentially brings a Community of Practice to life" (p. 389). Behind the concept of "thinking together" is mutual engagement, an essential element of social structures such as communities of practice – meaning how and what people do together when they share practice (Pyrko *et al.*, 2016).

3. Method

This study is a qualitative in-depth case study (Stake, 2010). It is an approach in which the investigator explored a real life, contemporary bounded system (a case) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and documents (Creswell, 2013). Taking into account that the context is constituted by the physical world and the social world, involving subjectivities, actions and discourses, special attention was paid to studying the context as a part of the descriptive character of the research (Stake, 2010).

The data were collected from February to May 2016, by means of ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) and from non-participant observation and documentary evidence. In total, 12 community members who perform similar tasks at the association were interviewed. The consultant of the association, who operates as an external supervisor of the community activities, was also interviewed. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed for analysis. Notes were also taken by the researchers as non-participant observers and recorded in field diaries to be used in the analysis stage. The data analysis was conducted using content analysis (Bardin, 2010) narrative analysis – with "meaning" as the analysis technique, as presented by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) – and document analysis techniques (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001). The variety of methods for gathering data allowed the triangulation approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009) to be used to assure greater construct validity (Creswell, 2013).

After the transcription of the interviews, content analysis was begun (Bardin, 2010). The interviews, once transcribed, underwent the process of codifying fragments of texts considered relevant that were interrelated with the theoretical approaches. These fragments, grouped into their respective categories, were interpreted for the analysis of this study. The data were processed using a three-step content analysis technique: pre-analysis, material exploration, and processing of the results and interpretation (Bardin, 2010). The analysis process is detailed in Figure 1.

3.1 Profile of the association of scavengers

The Waste and Citizenship Institute was founded in 2003, due to the need to organise the implementation of the agreements signed during the Waste and Citizenship Forum. This forum is held monthly, and around 100 entities (public, private and social organisations) gather to discuss the actions to be taken in favour of garbage collectors.

The forum is composed of a collegiate board and currently has representatives from the Federal Public Ministry, State Public Ministry and National Collectors Movement.
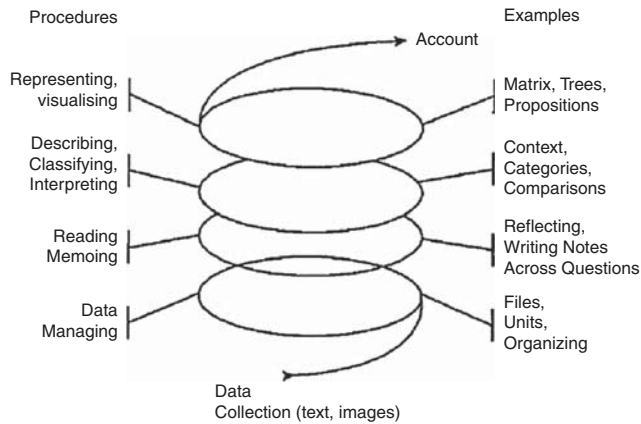
Figure 1.
The data
analysis spiral

Source: Creswell (2013)

The results of the forum are included in a document and its provisions approved by all for the execution of the projects. The projects are financed by the Municipal Government of Curitiba and executed by the Waste and Citizenship Institute, which has a multidisciplinary team. The intention is to optimise the resources and serve all the associations linked to the Institute (around 80 associations).

The association of scavengers, a nonprofit organisation that was the focus of this research, is made up of 18 members, all collectors of recyclable material. It was identified as being strongly representative of the 23 similar associations in Curitiba. The city is the first Brazilian capital to create conditions for direct disposal of selective waste collection by waste pickers, as recommended by the National Solid Waste Policy.

The association's activities are related to garbage separation and resale. Basically, the materials to be recycled are obtained from three sources: the private sector, public initiative, and scavengers. After receiving the waste, the members collectively begin the process of sorting and preparing the materials to be weighed and sold. There is a price list set by the agreement between the local government and the association for each material, with the members' remuneration based on individual productivity. Each member has a workstation where he or she sorts the waste. After separation, each member records the amount of selected waste by weight. This is the parameter for payment, which is made every 2 weeks.

The association has a contract with the Municipal Government of Curitiba as a part of the ECOCIDADÃO (ECOCITIZEN) Project, involving the Municipal Government, the association and the Waste and Citizenship Institute. According to the terms of the contract, the government supplies 40 tons of material for recycling and the association is responsible for its management and sorting. For this work, the association receives a monthly payment. Together with its modest budget, this payment ensures the financial security of the association to cover its fixed expenses.

Due to the high level of illiteracy of most of the members of the association, one of the key challenges in the data collection was to find a way to conduct the interviews and collect reliable data and information. This aspect can also be considered a limitation of the study.

4. Findings

4.1 Unique features

One of the characteristics of social organisations is that they take the form of associations. The association of recyclable scavengers is representative of this type of organisation.

Three main factors were identified to explain this reality. The first is that there is no Governing Board or government that sets the rules and regulations for the operation of these organisations. The second is the freedom of movement of the members in terms of joining or leaving the association. The members are mostly united on one point, which is to earn income to support their families. The third factor involves the lack of collective goals. Individual actions are predominant, with spontaneous engagement, little interaction and sensemaking, with loosely coupled processes (Weick, 1976; Orton and Weick, 1990). It was noted that the prevailing culture is strongly guided by a utilitarian concept, based mainly on individual work and immediate payment. "I'm not really good at working with other people. I prefer to work on my own" (interview extract).

It was found that organisational learning exists and is the result of interpersonal relationships, shared meaning based on experience, and the support of an external consultant. However, in practice, strong evidence has been found of the members' limitations when it comes to taking collective action. "We've met people that understand this better than we do, so we learn a lot" (interview extract). This is an organisation that structures its processes in an amateur and spontaneous manner, based on routines, individualist behaviour and little collaboration among members. This does not prevent it, however, from making a significant contribution to the community in social, environmental and economic terms.

4.2 Performance management
The social contract of the association shows that there is a formal structure of managerial positions, such as the president and vice president. There are also administrative roles such as the secretary, treasurer and fiscal council. This is just an attempt to formalise and establish a hierarchy as a basis for management (social contract). Nevertheless, it was observed that, in practice, informal leaders emerge and have considerable influence on the daily operations of the organisation, especially daily decisions and collective decisions resulting from meetings. This is clearly corroborated by one of the members, a respected informal leader, who has been with the association for more than three years. Regarding the leadership of the president of the association, she claims that "he is the president in name only, because he doesn't take any decisions without asking me first, you know" (interview extract). This understanding was widely shared by most of the participants (recorded in the minutes). This statement confirms that power, authority and leadership are not only a matter of achieving goals and performance at work, but also a matter of personal commitment and expectations (Anheier, 2014).

Conflicts that stem from the more important collective decisions were noted, such as decisions regarding investments to be made using the funds provided through the local government contract. These were triggered by a political factor, more specifically the influence of the informal leaders. Many of these decisions have to do with the general running of the association. They do not influence the main individual practices, but rather the relationships within the community. It was also noted that collective decisions are taken openly by voting, without any formalism from the leadership. However, there is considerable influence from the informal leaders in the decisions made (non-participant observation). This informality reinforces the role of the leadership in dealing with disagreements, tensions and engendering a sense of ownership and a desire for influence among multiple constituencies both inside and outside the walls of the organisation itself (Worth, 2018) to achieve better performance.

Some initiatives for capturing resources were observed. Many of the donations received were the result of initiatives by informal leaders and their respective networks of contacts with the community. In this regard, one of the members declared, "I think that we lack leadership because if I didn't take the reins, I don't think this thing would be going

anywhere" (interview extract). However, the members recognise the need for formal and legitimate leadership as a fundamental requirement for the organisation to develop (interview with consultant).

It was found that the infrastructure shared by the members, such as the expenses involving the rent of their physical structure, water and electricity, is paid for using the resources from the contract with the city government. While in traditional bureaucratic organisations, wages and salaries, as a rule, are defined by the position people occupy and the work they do, in this organisation the members are essentially paid according to their individual productivity. It is a case of individual decisions when it comes to compensation, as payment is determined solely by a member's individual production. The personal strategy is related to the amount of recyclable material to be sorted (interviews). The more a member produces, the more money he/she is paid, and this is one of the unique features of the organisation. This was a collective decision made by the members themselves (recorded in the minutes).

Therefore, the results of the work are measured individually twice a month. To monitor the results, everyone agreed to nominate and pay one of the members to take on the task of monitoring productivity using individual production sheets. This member was given guidance and training by the external consultant.

The managerial guidance at the association is provided by the consultant, who visits the organisation once a fortnight. He has made an important contribution to the operations of the organisation. However, informality remains prevalent. One of the main managerial challenges for the association is training for self-management (interview with consultant). The work is ongoing, and individualism and utilitarianism remain strong, although the members recognise the importance of collective management. The lack of schooling and the social hardships that the members have to endure seriously hinder development, reinforcing amateur management practices.

The lack of an organisational mission to guide the work and define specific goals was noted. In this context, the priorities of the members are mostly guided and determined by their individual goals. Collective goals are almost non-existent, as highlighted by Cyert and March (1963). The goals that do exist are utilitarian and existential in nature, determined by the individual behaviour of the members and directly linked to decisions regarding the type and amount of material to be sorted, and the consequent prospects of payment.

In an anarchical context such as this, there are no guidelines and few real controls are made by the management in the person of the president. It was found that the current president has no legitimacy. Minor daily conflicts are resolved between the parties involved or with the intervention of the informal leadership (non-participant observation and interviews).

Despite the informal relations that characterise the organisational culture, it was noted that some informal collective meetings are held, chaired by the president and recorded in the minutes. The decisions that affect all the members are essentially taken at collective meetings, where all members have a voice and vote (non-participant observation). This is a shared process of learning how to decide and act, involving people's interests on the lowest rung of the social ladder with no training or experience in management as members of an associative organisation. This reinforces that it is a "multi-faceted, flexible approach to management and not the use of singular, ready-made models carried over from the business world" (Anheier, 2014, p. 328).

Although the decisions made at the collective meetings are participative, considerable resistance was identified when it came to putting the agreed actions into practice, characterizing a small political arena with debates and discussions (non-participant observation). There is apparent transparency in the decisions. However, in practice, actions are taken without collective consultation and in an informal manner. "At the meetings, we talk, but later on people are exchanging different ideas". "We might give our opinions, but there are one or two people who actually make the decisions […]" (interview extract) and non-participant observation.

4.3 Multiplicity of practices

The multiplicity of practices can be observed in the group efforts to align actions between the members of the organisation and individual actions, all without guidelines and with little concern over collective actions. There is no management to operationalise the sorting of recyclable waste and no concrete management regarding the individual division of labour or division of labour into groups starting with the delivery of the material. A statement by one of the members of the organisation corroborates this: "We have work groups that are formed by people who get on with each other. There are no rules. Nobody decides anything. It's a decision made by the people who are here" (interview extract).

Some members form groups at random to unload material for recycling, while others separate the material, and everyone selects what will be recycled (non-participant observation). There are no formal rules or even any prior organisation. There is only spontaneous integration before the separation of materials begins. Each member does his work individually, striving to produce what he can, channelling his efforts to earn his individual wages based on the amount of material recycled and weighed. According to one of the interviewees, "Everyone gets a bag, takes it to his table and starts doing his sorting" (interview extract).

Members are guided in their work by an amateur form of management and their behaviour is strongly influenced by insights, spontaneity, creativity, hunches and individual limits (non-participant observation). The result is the formation of a community of practice different from what would be expected in theory (Wenger, 2003), with little integration and interpretation by the group or collective using sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The low levels of education, the illiteracy of the members and the lack of professionalism at the association are factors that have prevented the introduction of improvements to the current management of the organisation (non-participant observation and interview with consultant).

The performance of the organisation is conditioned by the ability of individuals and groups to sort 40 tons of waste every week rapidly and efficiently. Each member generates a systematic family income of approximately $250 a fortnight (consultant report) and develops social and environmental awareness. Members have enjoyed significant improvements in their living conditions through their work at the association. "Things have got better. I wouldn't change it for anything. It helps the unemployed. I even managed to get my driving license after I came to work here. That just shows that the work is good, and it's very good for a lot of people […]" (interview extract). This context presupposed the ability to change, adapt and evolve (McDaniel, 2007; Richardson, 2011; Stacey, 2011).

The results clearly highlight a significant increase in the income of the members, particularly the buying power created by the wages they receive through the association. "I have things at home now that I wouldn't have been able to buy before" (interview extract). Growing awareness on the part of the members regarding the social contribution that their work makes to the community by fulfilling an environmental and social need in the city was also observed. As the local government cannot meet all the demands for recycling waste in the city, with its 2m inhabitants, associations such as these complement this need for the community.

Thus, in addition to a social mission, the income that results from membership of the organisation makes an important contribution to supporting low-income families. This triggers awareness of social construction in the eyes of the members and affords their association great relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of public agencies, and especially society.

A model is proposed in Figure 2 to demonstrate the complex and multiple interactions among the three main elements of the organisation which are somehow integrated by amateur management: unique features, performance management and multiplicity of practices are all represented by the thick dark lines. The thicker lines represent the integrating forces of social organisation, which are reciprocal to each other, while culture, engagement and leadership are the sustainable forces of those three main elements. The dotted lines signify the key exchange

Figure 2.
Model of convergence
of amateur
management and
performance
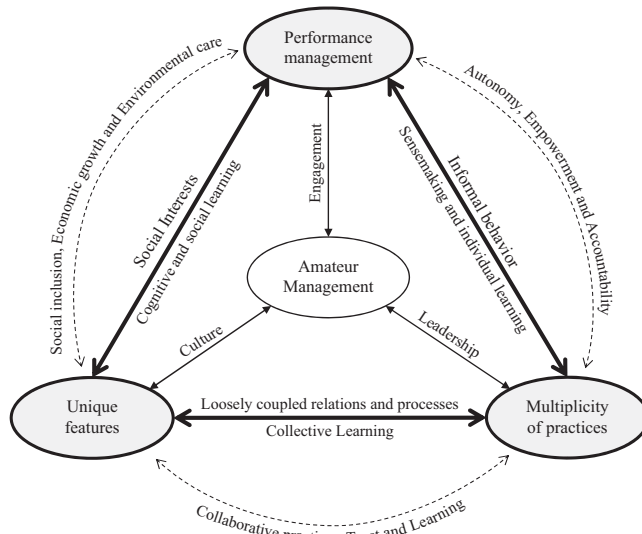
Source: Prepared by the authors

actions that prevail among the three main constitutive elements of the organisation. Overall, this picture, in essence, represents the internal dynamic forces that drive the association and also impact organisational behaviour and outcomes.

The relationship between unique features and multiplicity of practices was marked by loosely coupled relations and processes. These processes involved informal practices of members and managerial practices that emerged from a "hands-on" approach. Collective learning was evidenced through communities of practice with some common interests meeting at work, discussing and sharing experiences of knowledge and through trust based on relationships. This reinforces the statement of Hatch (2018, p. 205) as a place where individuals are "doing something separately together". Despite the tendency of individuals to compose this social organisation to suit their individual interests, the managerial role was essential to align and engage common goals through informal relationships based on trust, collaboration and learning.

Multiplicity of practices and performance management were instrumented through informal behaviour, through the interpretation and action of the members (sensemaking), promoting individual learning and achieving the expected performance. This approach shows significant linkages between the cognitive tasks of scanning, interpretation and action as a part of sensemaking processes, highlighted by Thomas *et al.* (1993). The autonomy and empowerment of the individual provided by flexible and loosely articulated management have allowed significant results to be achieved with due accountability for their performance.

The main goal of social inclusion, economic growth and environmental care was achieved through social interest, supported by the performance of community practices. The utilitarian behaviour was evidenced as a significant individual performance. However, it did not cover the collective interest. These are individual units, whose activities, conversations, productions and reflections of participants represent not only participation but also a consistent social learning system (Wenger, 2003; McDaniel, 2007), as a unique feature of a social organisation. The concept of "thinking together" (Pyrko *et al.*, 2016) was noticed in the context of mutual engagement, particularly when people share community practices to achieve better collective performance.

Amateur management was directly related to performance through engaging individuals and society. In addition, it was linked to the multiplicity of practices through an effective and informal leadership that articulated internal and external processes and also connected to unique features through organisational culture. Organisational learning was demonstrated as a cognitive and social learning system (Gherardi *et al.*, 1998; Wenger, 2003; Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini *et al.*, 2015) and promoted through interpersonal relationships (individuals and groups). Learning process focussed on economic, social and environmental interests, under the guidance of an external consultant. The social interests of members enabled the unique features of this organisation, despite a utilitarian culture, to be developed to achieve a relevant performance from which the organisation, community and the members benefitted.

5. Discussion and social implications

Understanding social organisations requires considerable effort because of the complexity of their reality. In this case, two inherent levels of organisations are important when it comes to analysing and discussing them, according to March (1986). The first involves actions and the way organisations deal with the environment. The second has to do with interpreting organisational life. While the first is characterised by actions that result from the experience and routines incorporated into them, the second is dominated by intellect and metaphors derived from theory. In this case, sensemaking is important in interpreting acts and facts that occur within organisations. This is a social process of an exchange of perceptions in the construction of organisational reality (Weick, 1995).

Five main points identified in the management practices of this type of associative organisation in question were highlighted. These elements are representative of the organisational reality and the amateur management predominant in this association, with significant results.

First, there is no mission or organisational goals, only individual goals. The organisational goals are normally perceived as deriving from individual actions. Despite appreciating rationality in the rational formulation of goals, the literature is replete with attempts to develop the main implications and possible limitations in the awareness, accuracy and coherence of organisational goals (Cyert and March, 1963). This especially applies to social organisations. The dilemma facing managers is represented by the balance between financial sustainability and fulfiling the social mission (Moore, 2000). Actually, there is a discrepancy between fulfilling the organisational mission and managing limited resources (Oster, 1995). Although the association in question does not have a clear set of common objectives, the members and the community expect an environmental, social and economic purpose to be served. The mission supposedly permeates the organisation and its management, but given the insufficient control, elements that enable its clear perception, materialisation and evaluation are not constructed.

The purpose of nonprofit organisations is to make a difference in society by providing services in a variety of areas (Drucker, 1990). The association fulfils a social, environmental and economic requirement, thus serving an informal and unmaterialised purpose. There is a social and environmental expectation that is partially met through individual goals that focus on the individual and utilitarian goals of the members.

Second, an anarchic structure and behaviour prevail in the organisation. This kind of structure and behaviour actually hinder the use of any rational managerial approaches as suggested by the mainstream literature in the field. These approaches simply would not fit or be productive in such a setting. Thus, a community of practice can be perceived as both a simple and complex social system. What integrates both systems is the relationship between individual and social participation that have somehow become entwined, leading to what is identified by meaning based on experience (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and as a social learning system (Wenger, 2003). This approach reinforces the concept that organisations are

"symbiotic systems that require commitment, participation, and common problem-solving" based on strong ideological foundations (Anheier, 2014, p. 145).

The existence of an anarchic context was noticed, characterised by individual actions with unpredictability and uncertainty derived from the amount of waste to be delivered daily and changes through micro-practices. These elements reinforce the understanding of Mintzberg (2009a) that such contexts favour nonprofessional management.

It was observed that the management of the association, because it receives resources (consultant report), is bound to account for the use of these resources. This is a requirement of the Municipal Government and is clearly stated in the contract. Due to the inexperience of the members and the lack of professionalisation, this process is conducted with the help of an external consultant linked to the Waste and Citizenship Institute, which looks after the accounting requirements of the association and issues receipts (report data). The aim of the consultant is to train the members to manage the accounting process themselves (interview with Consultant).

Third, it was noticed that the predominant practices in this community are individual practices, with few interactions among individuals or even groups of practitioners. Thus, it was discovered that the association has a community of individual practices. Such a context, however, does not match the vision of an integrated individual and social learning system (Gherardi et al., 1998; Wenger, 2003; Nicolini et al., 2015). It may be that the organisation is a context in which "the unmanaged zone" (Gabriel, 1995) is predominant.

The individual practices, with connected community actions that share some common points, maintain the identity and characteristics that represent a loosely coupled system (Weick, 1976; Orton and Weick, 1990). This characteristic of associative organisations is a system with elements that act independently and challenges previously determined management models.

Another challenge in the management of the association is to promote collaborative management in the context of an "unmanaged zone" (Gabriel, 1995). One of the barriers is the lack of legitimacy and weak formal leadership of the president. A legitimate formal leadership would aid the development of the organisation through greater integration and channelling efforts that would make the members more enthusiastic and motivated.

Communities of practice can also be seen as social and cultural organisations (Yanow, 2003) in which individuals practice sensemaking (Weick, 1995). By doing so, they seek meaning by interpreting the daily facts and events of organisational life and reducing the ambiguity (Weick, 1979) embedded in intentions, decision and actions. In the case of the association of scavengers, the sense of community is slowly growing among the members since decisions regarding investments in the organisation are discussed at collective meetings (interviews).

Fourth, the culture that prevails in the organisation is strongly oriented by a utilitarian culture based mainly on work and compensation. The utilitarian culture observed in the study is directly related to the generation of income to meet the basic needs of the family. The concerns over changing and developing the organisation, and concerns of a social and environmental nature, are deemed to be of less importance and are not viewed as a priority by the members. This is constituted as another factor that hinders the introduction of innovation into the organisation, with the predominant thinking being the maintenance of the *status quo*.

It may be that the lack of engagement on the part of the members of this organisation can be attributed to the fact that there is no effective leadership. In this respect, Mintzberg (2009b) warned that the concept of community is more easily preserved and flourishes better in the nonprofit sector and cooperatives, organisations that are really guided by their mission and where people are more engaged and stimulated by trust and strong culture and leadership. This has helped to strengthen the utilitarianism and individualism that

are predominant in the organisational behaviour, in contrast with the interests of the association and even social interests.

Finally, the fifth point, the high level of illiteracy among members of the association is a barrier to changes and innovation in managerial and organisational terms. One way to overcome the obstacles would be to concentrate some effort on the informal leadership that already exists within the association. The potential influence of informal leadership in the association was observed since it gained legitimacy. One of the major challenges of management, as highlighted by Handy (2002), is knowing how to deal with people, solve problems and make things happen in an organisation. In this case, encouraging informal leadership, e.g., with the help of the consultant, would gradually create a favourable climate for innovation and improvements, seeking a better productive arrangement.

It is known that nonprofit organisations like the association of dcavengers are not organised like business firms or government agencies. In the case in question, management is practised in an amateur manner, as the members have no prior experience or knowledge of management. They are simple and illiterate people living on the outskirts of an urban centre with a population of 2m people. Multiplicity of practices reflects an organisational setting in which the absence of rules and roles prevails, and is strongly characterised by an anarchic structure, loosely coupled relations, informal relationships and individual work. Cooperation is not intense, but it does exist and is a practised informality by the organisation's members.

Overall, the association can be characterised as a loosely structured setting (Orton and Weick, 1990), where individuals act and interact while performing their informal everyday practices. In this environment the organisation's members experience cognitive and social learning as identified in the literature by Gherardi *et al.* (1998) and Gherardi (2006).

6. Future research
Considering the performance and productivity of the association in question, and its significant results for society, some questions can be raised for future research: does it make sense to explore managerial improvements in such a unique and special context? Would it be appropriate to seek a change in the amateur approach by incorporating managerial models and tools from business and government? To what extent would it be feasible to introduce traditional and new forms of management to improve the individual and organisational performance of the association of scavengers?

Although we recognise the importance of these research contributions, much remains to be done in this field of study. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyse, in a comparative study, the significant implications of the model proposed in this study regarding the functioning and performance of different types of services of social organisations. It would be important to corroborate the model, examining the diversity of factors, including intraorganisational and interorganisational relations, that could influence the amateur management and performance of social organisations. We encourage further research by specifically examining the influence of power and politics on the performance of these social organisations.

7. Concluding remarks
The conclusions suggest that the combination of spontaneous behaviour, anarchic structure and loosely coupled relations has created an informal setting in which amateur management flourishes. The outcomes of this organisational effort are represented by the improvement of the financial conditions of the members and their families together with a sense of social contribution to the community. While the former is due to the growth of individual income, the latter is related to the promotion of a cleaner and more environmentally aware city, enhancing the association's image and social legitimacy.

Management is practised in an amateur manner in a context in which simple tasks are performed by simple people without any prior experience in management. Their commitment was initially individual, but was later inspired by the community and social values. The work is a result of strictly individual choices and autonomy of the agents without supervision. Whenever necessary, informal group interactions take place and members get together to solve particular issues.

The context is better represented as a place dominated by utilitarian and selfish interests that prevail among people who are mostly illiterate. It is an organisation where formal management cannot be applied, a terrain that is simply unmanaged (Gabriel, 1995). Managerial improvements in such a setting are always incremental, and adjustments to the special features of the organisation and the nature of the work carried out are always required.

An explanatory model was proposed focusing on the key elements that enable the functioning, behaviour and performance of a unique association. This model may also contribute to further studies seeking to understand the behaviour and multiplicity of practices of social organisations of this kind. The explanatory model could either be tested or provide guidance for further studies in similar contexts.

Studies that focus on nonprofit organisations, with very specific characteristics, such as the amateur management of the association of recyclable scavengers, remain scarce in the literature. This work contributed by pointing out different forms of management that are very unlike bureaucratic managerial approaches, although with significant results for society. Our understanding is that it would be equally important for the agenda of future studies to include an analysis of how this type of associate organisation is managed in different countries.

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