

**Executive summary**

The social economy is made of organisations – cooperatives, associations and mutual funds – that claim their social goal overrun their business target. The sector covers a variety of activities and can be divided into three groups : the 'institutionalised' want to be corporations just like any others, the 'committed' place militant involvement first, the 'alterpreneurs' try to accomodate pragmatism and beliefs. The social mission of the non profit companies sources its employees' outstanding involvement. Does it also generate specific management ways, that could possibly be transferred to other sectors? Such is the question this study is attempting to address.

A state of the art conveys a picture of the (scarce) researches available on the subject. Some authors advocate for the third sector's difference characterized by collective dynamics and strong cultural standards. Coordination is adjusted to relations. Other researchers claim the social economy should be assimilated to the main management stream. Performance monitoring and human resources policies do indeed enable the sector to become more professional. The combination of business and social targets relates to the wider social responsibility focus.

Interviews with eleven managers bring additional material to these matters. They disclose a social economy manager both able to use the cultural gear, to perform in the complexity generated by many stakeholders and multiple bottom lines. Participation is preferred even though it requires more time-and transparency. Employees' involvement can not be mastered, since it relies more on their own self motivation ability than on incentives policies. Control systems are flawed and change acceptance is restrained, especially since recruitment and career opportunities are managed endogenously.

Good practice transfers with the profit sector could offer significant opportunities to both parties, in particular as to companies' governance. Human resources management in the social economy could be improved in getting the managers closer to their staff, in developing learning organisations, in enhancing career opportunities and in communicating on the sector's and its employer's strong rationales.