

## 2009 School Seminar Series

Waikato Management School  
Te Raupapa



# Communication, Work, Democracy and the Market: Lessons from the Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque Country, Spain

Tuesday, 11 August 2009  
4.00pm – 5:15pm  
MSB 4.02

**Professor George Cheney**  
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### Abstract

George began a longitudinal study of the Mondragón cooperatives in late 1991, after beginning to work in the arena of employee participation with Prof. Cynthia Stohl. Background reading took him into research on alternative economics and especially worker-owned-and-governed enterprises. At that time, Mondragón was already one of the most famous cases of cooperativism in the world. However, it had been studied by economists, sociologists, and anthropologists mainly in terms of its structure, financial performance, and dual leadership system. Very little had been written on the micro-practices of participation or on how central values—such as participation, equality, and participation—were interpreted and applied by various stakeholders. Starting with an intensive tour in 1992 and continuing with five months of fieldwork in 1994, George probed the question of how home-grown participative systems were faring as the co-ops engaged globalization, especially in advance of and in response to the dropping of market barriers within the European Union in 1992. As George's study developed, the scope of research broadened to include the ways globalization, marketization, and consumerism were being conceived and practiced by management in the co-ops (including references to global managerial trends) and to how those understandings and activities related to changes in the wider community. Following the publication of the book *Values at Work* in 1999 and the updating of it in 2002, George left this project to work on other things. With an opportunity to return to Mondragón in November, 2008, to give an address on the importance of social values at a time of economic crisis and with a subsequent visit to Mondragón University in June of this year, the door opened to potential new investigations of the co-ops and the society of which they are part. This colloquium will chart the path of co-ops and research on them, concluding with sketches of case studies for the future. The talk will range across issues of identity, ethics, participation, globalization and will invite further discussion of the Mondragón experience vis-à-vis existing and emerging trends at work and in the global economy.

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