

Coopetition in the Business Landscape: Shaping Strategies, Paradoxes, and Future Prospects

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In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, coopetition has emerged as a powerful strategy for organizations seeking sustainable growth and competitive advantage. Coopetition is a blend of cooperation and competition between inside or within firms, or across industries (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). The increased interest in coopetition research stems from its widespread existence as a common industry practice and its inherent paradoxical nature (Gernsheimer et al., 2024; Leite et al., 2018).

This special issue is inspired by the different themes and approaches to coopetition research, focusing on its multiple implications. Although there is a substantial advancement on coopetition, both theoretically and management-like, still exist gaps that require further development. These gaps include delving into the societal impacts of coopetition, its role to generate sustainable development, the dynamics of multimarket coopetition, the intra-firm coopetition, and its consequences within firms, as well as the complex processes to implement cooperative strategies within firms' networks.

Currently, coopetition is a well-known topic in interfirm relationships with 25 years of research. Therefore, coopetition achieved some maturity and can be defined as a theory (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018), that supports the discussion of strategies of value creation, value appropriation, and value destruction (Albert-Cromarias et al., 2022) or social value devolution (Chim-Miki et al., 2023). The term, coined by Cherington (1913) through the discourse of Kirk S. Pickett, an oyster manufacturer of Sealshipt Oyster System, first appeared in literature to describe a network of relationships among oyster dealers. Pickett emphasized that these dealers were not in direct competition but cooperating to expand their collective business, thus engaging in 'co-opetition' (Rusko, 2015). In 1937, R. Hunt reintroduced the idea in the *Los Angeles Times*. However, the idea received little attention (Yami et al., 2010), and only in 1980s, decades later, the term gained traction in managerial discourse. The credit for popularizing the term 'coopetition' is often attributed to Ray Noorda, the founder and CEO of Novell, who mentioned it in the 1980s while discussing the need for firms to both compete and cooperate simultaneously in increasingly complex markets (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Padula & Dagnino, 2007). In the following decade, coopetition entered academic discourse and became the



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subject of theoretical inquiry, notably with the publication of 'Co-opetition' by [Brandenburger and Nalebuff \(1996\)](#). This seminal publication utilized game theory to advocate for the strategic approach of 'sleeping with the enemy, urging firms to learn to cooperate with their competitors ([Coy, 2006](#)).

Coopetition is "a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors simultaneously involved in cooperative and competitive interactions, regardless of whether their relationship is horizontal or vertical" ([Bengtsson & Kock, 2014, p. 182](#)). It is acknowledged as a paradoxical, multifaceted, multilevel phenomenon aimed at comprehending the strategies employed in firm relationships ([Chen, 2008](#); [Gnyawali & Park, 2009](#)). Additionally, coopetition has been recognized as a context-dependent strategy that offers learning opportunities to suppliers, buyers, and other stakeholders ([Czakon et al., 2020](#)).

[Peng et al. \(2018\)](#) have classified prior work investigating coopetition as attempting to explain three different aspects: why it happens, how the process is carried out, and what outcomes it have. In these terms, coopetition can be analyzed as context, process, or result. Coopetition as a context is often depicted as a chain that enhances firm value through environmental interaction ([Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996](#)). This chain encompasses customers, suppliers, substitutes, and complementors collectively called 'the value net.' Coopetition as a process involves the dynamic interplay of collaboration and competition among firms over time. This process involves identifying areas where cooperation can be mutually beneficial, negotiating terms of collaboration, and managing the tensions that arise from simultaneous cooperation and competition ([Monticelli et al., 2023](#)). Coopetition as a result refers to the outcomes and implications of collaborative competition within an industry or ecosystem. These outcomes can manifest in various ways, such as increased market efficiency ([Monticelli et al., 2022](#)), enhanced sectorial standards ([Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018](#)), internationalization ([Dana et al., 2013](#)), or accelerated innovation ([Ritala & Sainio, 2014](#)). Ultimately, coopetition as a result underscores the transformative impact of cooperation and competition on industry dynamics and firm outcomes ([Leite et al., 2018](#)).

The theoretical foundations of coopetition are varied, with prominent influences from game theory, the resource-based view (RBV), and network theory ([Klimas et al., 2023](#)). From the perspective of game theory, scholars examine coopetition as a win-win interplay, analyzing the equilibrium between value creation (pursuing collective benefits) and value appropriation (seeking individual gains). Consequently, players engage in actions aimed at generating value for all participants ([Ritala & Tidström, 2014](#)). The resource-based view has been associated with the concept of coopetition to underscore the idea that through collaboration with rival entities, businesses can gain access to new resources and capabilities that may not be attainable through individualistic business models ([Crick, 2020](#)). Moreover, from the resource-based view, coopetition is a relational resource that can leverage the potential of sources to obtain a competitive advantage ([Crick et al., 2022](#)). Researchers in the network theory domain emphasize the significance of network characteristics and positions. Networks serve as the foundation for developing competitive advantages by elucidating how firms access and expand their knowledge and resources through cooperative relationships ([Meena et al., 2023](#)). The crucial aspect lies in the sharing of outcomes derived from cooperative strategies, which may result from joint value creation, company value enhancement, or even value destruction ([Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018](#)). However, balancing the dynamics of competition and cooperation can be challenging, primarily due to the tensions inherent in both strategies ([Schweizer et al., 2023](#)).

By pooling resources, sharing knowledge, and co-creating solutions, firms can address complex challenges, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and drive collective progress. However, realizing the full potential of coopetition requires a shift in mindset and organizational culture. Firms must cultivate a spirit of openness, trust, and collaboration, transcending traditional rivalries. They must embrace ambiguity, tolerate risk, and navigate the delicate balance between cooperation and competition. Policymakers and regulators play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment conducive to coopetition, fostering fair competition while safeguarding against anti-competitive behavior.

The papers in this special issue covered different empirical settings, such as the shipping industry, breweries, the financial sector, new technology-based firms (NTBFs), and drugstore retailers. This editorial inspires the analysis of coopetition as a driver for strengthening different interplays among scholars, businesses, governments, and society. Is coopetition a motor of innovation and tech business? The article 'The role of coopetition in fostering innovation and growth in new technology-based firms: A game theory approach' helps answer this question. It presented a multi-method to verify the drivers of collaboration with competitors in a technology-based firm context. Coopetition showed its effect on competitive advantage since it accelerates the capacity of technological firms to amplify market share and commercialize their innovations.

Is coopetition cycle value creation context-dependent on specific business models? What challenges and solutions are faced by a non-technological and non-profit organization in a multisided platform business model that

operates as a coopetition network? These questions found some statements from the article 'Coopetition through multisided platforms business model: A case study of FEBRAFAR value cycle.' It studies coopetition within a multisided platform of drugstore retailers, manufacturers, and service providers. This business model offers considerable challenges to non-tech firms. In this context, the article's findings illustrated that coopetition has shown to be an asset to creating value; however, first, some conditions need to be created, such as rules and interaction protocols.

There is an intrinsic tension in cooperating with competitors, as scholars claim (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). Nevertheless, previous studies point out that, in some contexts, competition has a higher effect on consolidating the coopetition networks than cooperation (Della Corte & Sciarelli, 2012). Then, we asked: Is the tension a negative output of coopetition or a necessary condition to maintain the cooperative dynamics in an ecosystem? Are there different types of tensions in coopetition? The article 'Untangling cooperative dynamics: A microanalysis of collaborative and competitive tensions in an ecosystem' will help understand these questions. The authors analyzed the coopetition dynamics in an ecosystem, a cooperative context where various behaviors coexist. The coopetition tensions emerge from both similarities and differences among players. The authors pointed out three key patterns of tension: the interplay between identity formation and self-determination, the dichotomy of 'islands' and 'archipelagos,' and the nuances of performance asymmetries. The article deepens the acknowledgement of this intrinsic tension that characterizes coopetition.

Another study related to understanding the tension of coopetition but focusing on a sector and horizontal network of competitors is the article 'Tensions in coopetition between gypsy and non-gypsy breweries in the light of actor-network theory.' This article helps us understand how to manage the tension to generate better rates of coopetition. It showed that in some contexts, nonhuman elements, such as factories, resources, equipment, and operations, are the main source of coopetition tensions. Under the light of actor-network theory, the authors help us understand the role of factors (human and nonhuman) in the interplay to achieve shared goals and how to manage coopetition tensions.

Coopetition occurs at different levels, but most studies focus on the inter-organizational level. Thus, many questions about coopetition at the intraorganizational level need to be answered. How can coopetition within organizations help them? The article 'Exploring the adoption of intraorganizational coopetition in competitive environments: Implications for the banking sector' contributes to deepening coopetition within firms using the Brazilian public bank as the context of analysis. It explores a sublevel of coopetition since it occurs among branches and superintendencies of the same business group. It is intraorganizational but also inter-organizational. Once more, coopetition has proven to be a powerful strategy to improve commercial performance, efficiency, and knowledge sharing, but it also presented challenges associated with the benefits.

Scholars claim that coopetition is an excellent business strategy. However, each industry has particularities. Is coopetition able to promote beneficial interplays between ecosystems that go beyond the conventional limits? To answer this question, the article 'Coopetition and cooperation in the shipping industry: A study on the Brazilian coast' presented coopetition effects on a particular sector and produced insights to understand coopetition strategies between global actors. The authors confirmed that market pressures induce coopetition since the interplay moves the players to attend to market coverage, customer needs, and reduced operating costs.

In resume, this editorial highlights the significance of understanding coopetition on both flanks, as strategy creation and execution, as well as the effects of coopetition, the positive and negative outputs. On top of it, valuable insights into decision-making processes, shaping behavior and performance from coopetition are delivered in this special issue. The coopetition strategy also generates concerns around mastering unprincipled activities inside cooperative arrangements, highlighting the need for efficient methods to guarantee fairly created values to firms, and to the consumers.

Conclusively, this editorial calls on scholars and practitioners to explore more deeply the paradoxical behavior of coopetition, discovering its diversity of dimensions and exploring its potential as an innovation driver, a source of sustainable growth, and a creator of value.

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