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Anna Minà

**Coopetition beyond old  
and new perspectives**



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*To those who taught me  
to strive for continuous improvement  
and unrelenting desire for excellence*



To learn something new,  
take the path that you  
took yesterday .

John Burroughs,  
*Signs and Seasons* (1886)





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## Introduction

For many years, coopetition has been considered as an emergent construct in strategic management research. Actually, while Henderson Deutsch, and Hamel, Doz and Prahalad all argued for the strategic relevance of cooperating with competitors to achieve competitive advantage<sup>1</sup>, after Brandenburger and Nalebuff's pioneering book labeled "Co-opetition", the coexistence of competition and cooperation became intelligible in strategic decision making<sup>2</sup>. Since this seminal work, other authors have dug into the forms that cooperative relations can take<sup>3</sup>.

Although nowadays coopetition has exploded significantly and we can see a huge amount of papers published on this topic, especially in the last decade, we argue that to explore the roots and core issues characterizing coopetition requires to focus our analysis uniquely on the initial studies that have supported the emergence and diffusion of coopetition in the management realm. Paraphrasing the American naturalist and poet John Burroughs: «The place to observe nature is where you are: the walk to take to-day is the walk you took yesterday. You will not find just the same things». Therefore, «to learn something new, take the path that you took yesterday». The main idea of

<sup>1</sup> G. HAMEL, Y.L. DOZ, C.K. PRAHALAD, *Collaboration with Your Competitors – and Win*, in «Harvard Business Review», vol. 67, n. 1, 1989, p. 133–139; B.D. HENDERSON, *Brinkmanship in business*, in «Harvard Business Review», vol. March–April, n. 67205, 1967; M. DEUTSCH, *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> A. BRANDENBURGER, B.J. NALEBUFF, *Co-opetition*, HarperCollinsBusiness, London, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> M. BENGTTSSON, S. KOCK, *Coopetition in business networks – to cooperate and compete simultaneously*, in «Industrial Marketing Management», vol. 29, n. 5, 2000, pp. 411–426; G.B. DAGNINO, *Coopetition strategy: a new kind of interfirm dynamic for value creation*, in G.B. DAGNINO, E. ROCCO (Eds), «Coopetition strategy, theory, experiments and cases», Routledge, London, pp. 25–43; D.R. GNYAWALI, R. MADHAVAN, *Cooperative Networks and Competitive Dynamics: A Structural Embeddedness Perspective*, in «Academy of Management Review», vol. 26, n. 3, 2001, pp. 431–445; D.R. GNYAWALI, J.Y. HE, R. MADHAVAN, *Impact of co-opetition on firm competitive behavior: An empirical examination*, in «Journal of Management», vol. 32, n. 4, 2006, pp. 507–530;

this book is, thus, to grasp the pillars and driving aspects that have shaped coopetition since its birth. Accordingly, we focus on the seminal articles and papers published until 2010.

In this book we address four main questions. First, how has coopetition been constructed and defined in the literature and what meanings have been attributed to it? Initially literature on coopetition has a blurring idea of the concept as it is declined in several ways<sup>4</sup>. Some studies look at the core idea as the “coexistence of cooperation and competition”<sup>5</sup>, while others consider it the “partial convergence of interests between actors”<sup>6</sup>.

Such aspect leads in turn, to the relevance of addressing the second question: is the coopetition concept being reified and fixed in scholarly articles or is it being allowed to remain open for further construction and interpretation? Reification processes could lead to the objectification of the coopetition so that it achieves a taken-for-granted meaning. Following Lane, Koka and Pathak, our aim is to show how “coopetition” has emerged and how it may have been changed due to reification processes<sup>7</sup>. In so doing, we are in the position to clarify the use of the construct as it emerged in scholarly communications and understand and if its meaning and application increasingly fixed and limited. Therefore, the main purpose is to grasp how coopetition is collectively understood and how this has shaped directions for further coopetition research.

The study that fills the two above mentioned questions represents the background to understand whether is coopetition “something new” or “old wine in a new bottle”. Then, by considering studies of coopetition as management innovation, we want to explore the socio-cognitive model underlying the coopetition literature. Specifically, we investigate how such a model can lead the emergence of new management practices, processes and structures that support organizational value creation. This lead to the third question of this book, that is: in what ways coopetition can be conceived as a management innovation

<sup>4</sup> A. TIDSTRÖM, *Perspective on coopetition on an actor and operational level*, in «Management Research», vol. 6, n. 3, pp. 205–215.

<sup>5</sup> A. BRANDENBURGER, B.J. NALEBUFF, *op. cit.*; M. BENGTSSON, S. KOCK, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> G.B. DAGNINO, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> P.J. LANE, B.R., KOKA, S. PATHAK, *The Reification of Absorptive Capacity: A Critical Review and Rejuvenation of the Construct*, in «Academy of Management Review», vol. 31, n. 4, 2006, pp. 833–863.

and, if so, what are the drivers that support the emergence of coopetition? Finally, grasping whether coopetition may be conceived as a management innovation implies to dig deeper into the social processes that disclose coopetition. Therefore, the fourth research question to be addressed in this book is: what are the social and cognitive processes that unfold over time as coopetition develops?

This book is structured in three chapters. In Chapter 1, we use bibliographic coupling tool to organize the coopetition studies published from 1996 to 2010 based on the reference works they share. Based on their shared references, we can identify the theoretical roots and orientations that studies share. This mapping process identifies the degree of connection and cohesion among that study the references share and then, whether or not the concept can be considered as reified, meaning that the abstract notion of “cooperating and competing” is adopted with no real referent.

By adopting bibliometric methods such as coupling analysis, one can also identify the themes in the different research papers and so how the content of the coopetition field is being defined. Chapter 1 is organized as follows. To begin, we discuss the reification issue in the social sciences and the emergence of coopetition as a field of study. Then, we present and discuss the methodological features of the research, justify the sampling, and introduce the analysis. In the following sections, we combine our bibliometric coupling technique with multivariate statistical techniques to develop alternative visual maps of the coopetition research field. The first mapping offers a survey of the coopetition literature in terms of the definitions and meanings attributed to it, while the second offers a mapping of different authors’ approaches to coopetition studies.

Chapter 2 depicts coopetition as management innovation. In particular, we draw on Birkinshaw, Hamel and Mol’s definition of management innovation as involving new management practices, processes and structures intended to further organizational goals<sup>8</sup>. We consider the extent to which coopetition processes involve management innovation and whether this alternative conceptual perspective can better explain coopetition dynamics.

<sup>8</sup> J. BIRKINSHAW, G. HAMEL, M.J. MOL, *Management innovation*, in «Academy of Management Review», vol. 33, n. 4, 2008, pp. 825 – 845.