

# **Business, Economics and Science**

## *Common Challenges*

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# Theorizing on Coopetition as Dimension of Entrepreneurial Orientation

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*Keywords: Coopetition, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, competition, inter-organizational cooperation*

## 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is an important characteristic of organizations and individuals. It is important both for science and practice. A deeper understanding of entrepreneurs' behaviours is crucial for theory development. However, this understanding has important practical and managerial implications, as indicates some alternative way of pursuing opportunities, namely cooperation and coopetition. This is additionally important in the context of the development of numerous network structures, that gains the attention of numerous entrepreneurs.

The contemporary theory of entrepreneurship proposes several concepts of entrepreneurship. One of them is entrepreneurial orientation. It comprises several dimensions of entrepreneurial activity, namely, risk-taking, innovativeness, proactiveness, autonomy and competing. The latter is sometimes identified with aggressive posture towards competitors.

However, we can observe many examples of cooperation among entrepreneurs, that pertains also relationships between competitors. Such a situation is reflected in coopetition concept. Despite this, the contemporary theory of entrepreneurship tends to neglect the role of cooperation behaviours of entrepreneurs and their flexibility in relationships with other entrepreneurs. This chapter refers to this gap in the theory.

The aim of this study is to examine the role of coopetition in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities and identify its implication for the entrepreneurship theory and research. This examination tends to contribute to the entrepreneurship theory through including cooperation behaviours and proposing augmented model of entrepreneurial orientation.

This is a conceptual study. It based mainly on the literature on organizational entrepreneurship and coopetition, and a few studies that link both these fields. Particularly, the literature on cooperation and entrepreneurial orientation is analysed in terms of mutual connections and common approaches.

This chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, coopetition is presented. Secondly, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation are introduced. Thirdly, the role of the inter-organizational relationship in entrepreneurial context is elaborated. Fourthly, the model linking entrepreneurial orientation and coopetition is proposed. Finally, the limitations and implications of this study, as well as recommendations for future studies are presented.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Coopetition

The term coopetition was introduced by Noorda, however, it begun recognized after Brandenburger and Nalebuff published their book *Co-opetition* in 1996 [3]. Bouncken *et al.*, [3, p. 592] define coopetition as “a strategic and dynamic process in which economic actors

jointly create value through cooperative interaction, while they simultaneously compete to capture part of that value.” Coopetition is commonly identified with simultaneous cooperative and competitive interactions between the same actors. They can be direct competitors, or (in a broader sense) also suppliers, customers or complementors [3]. In coopetitive relationship, we can observe different configurations, wherein cooperation or competition dominates, or are equal [2]. Competition manifests through maximizing private gains, behaving opportunistically, and commencing a zero-sum approach [9]. Because of its dual nature, managers deal with coopetition paradox and the resultant paradoxical tension, that requires them coopetition capacity [24].

Coopetition is a universal phenomenon. It is visible across multiple industries and types of organizations [1]. Researchers underline the role of coopetition in the innovation process [27].

It is examined in the context of organizational sustainability [6]. For companies, competition is a strategic option for meeting the firm objectives more efficiently, however, some firms consider it as the only option for finding a potential business partner [31].

Coopetition networks increase alongside with firm’s development and tend to replace social and reputational networks that play an important role at earlier stages of development [18]. Because coopetition occurs in changing environments, and actually somehow reflects an entrepreneur’s reaction for these changes, it is more a process than a discrete situation [16].

## **2.2. *Entrepreneurship***

Entrepreneurship is “a process by which individuals – either on their own or inside organizations – pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control” [32, p. 23]. It is also identified with behaviours that are related to the creation of value through the exploitation of opportunities [14]. The entrepreneurial opportunities are “those situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, and organizing methods can be introduced and sold at greater than their cost of production” [5], quoted in: [30, p. 220]. The most visible part of the entrepreneurial process is creating an organization. For some scholars, this activity differentiates entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs [12]. The entrepreneurial process involves the identification and evaluation of opportunity, development of the business plan, determination of the required resources, and management of the resulting enterprise [14]. The entrepreneurial process does not end when the organization is founded, but it is continued within that organization, what results in initiating new projects or founding new spin-off organizations. This process can be repeated periodically. The activities aimed at creating new businesses in established companies are analysed in the frame of ‘corporate entrepreneurship’ [23]. Entrepreneurship is also identified with attitudes, namely the desire to achieve, the passion to create, the yearning for freedom, the drive for independence, hard-working, calculated risk-taking, continuous innovation, and undying perseverance [21]. They enable entrepreneurs to pursue an opportunity successfully.

One of the conceptualizations of entrepreneurship at the organizational level is the entrepreneurial orientation (EO). This concept is based on the definition of an entrepreneurial firm, as that “one that engages in product-market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with ‘proactive’ innovations, beating competitors to the punch” [22, p. 771]. Covin and Slevin have built a scale to measure the EO, which is comprised of three dimensions: risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactiveness [7], and Lumpkin and Dees augmented it by adding two more dimensions: autonomy and competitive aggressiveness [19]. Since that time, some modifications of the scale were proposed. The numerous researches have proved utility and reliability of EO scales. They have evidenced the relationship between EO and a firm’s performance (e.g., [15]). Moreover, Schillo suggests



that entrepreneurial orientation could be useful for practitioners as a source of managerial recommendations [29].

### **3. Linking Two Fields**

#### ***3.1. Coopetition in Pursuing Entrepreneurial Opportunities***

Coopetition relates to simultaneous competition and cooperation. Competition is reflected in the theory of entrepreneurship and it is highlighted in EO as one of its dimensions, namely competitive aggressiveness. It refers to a firm's propensity to directly and intensely challenge its competitors to achieve entry or improve position. It can take the form of head-to-head confrontation, and it can utilize unconventional methods of competing [19].

Cooperation tends to be neglected in the theory of entrepreneurship. However, there are several reasons for linking collaboration and entrepreneurship. Firstly, an entrepreneur's main motivation is to pursue an opportunity. They are able to follow this aim with different solutions that are efficient. In many cases they are ready or even prefer to cooperate. It is observed in modes of founding new companies, when many entrepreneurs start their business in partnership, which is also a case of many highly innovative start-ups [28]. Many existing entrepreneurial firms cooperate within networks, supply-chains, or clusters. Secondly, creating such long-term cooperation can be per se an entrepreneurial act, similar to creating a new firm, which is perceived as a manifestation of entrepreneurship [10]. Thirdly, many entrepreneurs, especially those running small businesses, are limited in their activity with the lack of resources. For them, cooperation is a way of overcoming resource limitation [20]. Finally, entrepreneurship is about creating value. This can be afforded with cooperation rather than with competing, as the latter is more about capturing value at the expense of the partner [4].

All above-mentioned situations can be reasons for opportunity-driven entrepreneurs to cooperate with competitors if it enables them exploiting an opportunity. However, the environment changes, which results in the appearance of new opportunities (as well as threats), requires entrepreneurs to be flexible in their relationships with other partners, including competitors. It means, they need to be able to compete and cooperate, as well as do both simultaneously. Thus, coopetition is additionally a manifestation of an entrepreneur's flexibility.

There are some concepts that suggest an association between entrepreneurship and cooperation. Collaborative entrepreneurship highlights a company's ability to collaborate outside the organization [26] that enables to create ideas that emerge from a sharing of information and knowledge that result in economic value [13]. In the similar vein, the symbiotic entrepreneurship focus on 'an enterprising effort by multiple parties, each of which benefits from the joint effort, such that added value is created' [8]. These processes are also reflected in the concept of alliance entrepreneurship, understood as an entrepreneurial practice resulting in the proactive formation of strategic tie-ups with partners to acquire strategic assets through these inter-firm relationships [17]. This concept was also analysed from the EO perspective as an entrepreneurial collective activity which aims to improve the partners' entrepreneurial status in terms of their innovativeness, risk-taking, and pro-activeness [25].

Finally, very rare studies relate to association between entrepreneurship and coopetition.

Soppe *et al.*, found that vertical coopetition (firm-supplier, -buyer, and -subcontractor relationships) is a ubiquitous phenomenon for entrepreneurial firms (specifically, their sample consisted of VC-financed companies) [31]. Bouncken *et al.* posit association of coopetition and entrepreneurship (as well as strategy, innovation, management, etc.) [3]. Galkina and Lundgren-Henriksson argue that "coopetition resembles an entrepreneurial process and

should thus be studied employing theories from the entrepreneurship domain, too” [11, p. 158].

The above reasoning leads to the conclusion, that in some situation’s entrepreneurs can pursue opportunity together with other entrepreneurs, through mutual cooperation, while in other situations they can prefer competition for the opportunity. And there are situations when entrepreneurs need to cooperate and compete simultaneously, i.e., they can pursue entrepreneurial opportunities through cooptation.

### 3.2. Including Cooptation to Entrepreneurial Orientation

The above deduction suggests that cooptation deserves to be reflected in entrepreneurship concepts and their operationalization. In this study, we attempt to analyze cooptation in the context of entrepreneurial orientation. This concept comprises several dimensions, however, most common are three-dimensional (comprising risk-taking, innovativeness and proactiveness) and five-dimensional (three previously mentioned and autonomy and competitive aggressiveness).

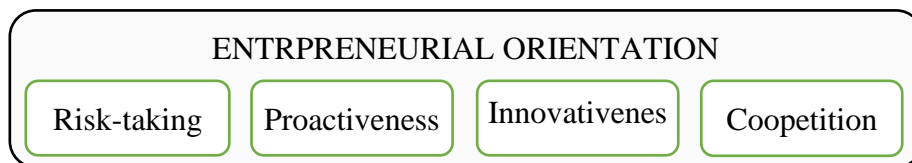
In case of five-dimensional operationalization, we posit to combine competition with cooperation, that results in replacement of competition (or competitive aggressiveness) with cooptation. Another solution is just to add one more dimension, i.e., cooperation. Such development of the EO concept is presented in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Five-dimensional concept of entrepreneurial orientation comprising cooptation.

*Source: own elaboration*

In relevance to operationalization that consists of three dimensions (i.e., risk-taking, innovativeness and proactiveness), it is recommended to add cooptation as a fourth one that, specifically, represents entrepreneurial cooptation to pursue an opportunity. Such development of the EO concept is presented in Fig. 2.



**Fig. 2.** Four-dimensional concept of entrepreneurial orientation: cooptation and three basic dimensions of EO

*Source: own elaboration*

The cooptation as a dimension of entrepreneurial orientation somehow represents an entrepreneur’s flexibility, at least in terms of external relations with other organization.

We believe that the proposed model reflects the entrepreneurial activity of majority organizations. However, in the case of non-profit organizations representing social entrepreneurship, wherein competition has minor importance, the better modification can consist of the inclusion of inter-organizational cooperation instead of cooptation.

#### 4. Limitations and Recommendations

The main limitation of this study comes from its method and scope. The study investigates the literature; however, it is rather argumentative than a systematic literature review. This study does not investigate the fields that are somehow associated with the main subject, like networking, clusters, supply-chains. As a preliminary investigation in the field, it indicates several directions recommended for future research. In the field of entrepreneurship, the comparative studies (both quantitative and qualitative) of coopetition, cooperation and competition in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities are recommended. It is also suggested to examine the role of the ability of simultaneous cooperative and competitive behaviours as well as entrepreneurs' flexibility in terms of external cooperation. In the field of coopetition research, it is recommended to investigate the role coopetition in in the entrepreneurial context in comparison to other contexts. The above-mentioned problems require examinations in the for-profit and no-profit sector, as both groups can differ in terms of their relationship with other entities. The methodology of coopetition research in entrepreneurial context needs to be developed, specifically its subjective and objective measures. Finally, the implementation of coopetition into EO scales is recommended and, consequently, testing such scales in terms of its reliability and utility for organizations of different types in terms of aim, size, or industry.

#### 5. Conclusions

This study investigates the role of coopetition in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. Its main result are models that augment entrepreneurial orientation with coopetition. This study contributes to theory development mainly in the field of entrepreneurship theory. It indicates the role of coopetition in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. This finding has some consequences for entrepreneurship conceptualizations and their operationalization, including measurement scales dedicated to entrepreneurship. Additionally, this study contributes to the theory of coopetition and inter-organizational relationships, by exposing the next field wherein coopetition plays an important role.

This study has a preliminary nature and it rather unveils research problems, than provides answers. Thus, further research is recommended on the role of coopetition in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. In particular, the empirical examination of the argued relationship is proposed, within samples consisting of different types of organizations and representing different industries and geographies. The results of such studies and their managerial implications can enhance the connection between science and business in the field of entrepreneurship.

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