

In strategic management, researchers focus on explaining sources of firms' competitive advantage. Still we are looking for answers for questions about the drivers of firm success and long-term performance. This project locates in the area of cooptition, being one of the most dynamically developing concepts in strategic management searching the answers in cooptition of business rivals.

Cooptition is a phenomenon referring to simultaneous cooperation and competition. Cooptitors are organizations that, at the same time, in some areas cooperate (e.g., co-create new technology), whilst compete in others (e.g., "fight" for the customers). Cooptition is complex (competition and cooperation overlap), unpredictable (full of paradoxes and tensions), dynamic (changeable in time as the behavior of cooptitors change continuously) phenomenon. Nonetheless, at the same time, it is very beneficial as it successfully accelerates innovation processes, intensifies firm development, and thus competitive advantage.

The multidimensional, financial- and time- related gains from cooptition result in its more frequent adoption as **the leading development strategy by a wide range of organizations**. Its popularization is prompted also by the external conditions related to the increasing costs of R&D, technological acceleration, growing focus on radical and disruptive innovations, aggravating the complexity and interdisciplinarity of products, and increasing level of customers' needs. Basically, hyperdynamics, complexity, uncertainty, and volatility of today's economic world explain the growing willingness and even the need of modern organizations to engage in various types of inter-organizational collaboration. Indeed, more often the increasing level of dynamics, uncertainty, or complexity implies that the best (or maybe the only appropriate?) **partner for cooperation there is a competitor**. A competitor struggling with the same strategic difficulties, developing the same technological path, looking for the same type of innovations, trying to meet the same - current and future - needs of the same customers.

The project aims at recognition of the features of cooperative relationships linking competitors and identification of the phases in which they develop. Furthermore, the focus is paid on the recognition of the impact of cooperative relationships features on - financial and non-financial - performance of cooperating competitors. Due to methodological and empirical shortcomings in investigations this study is run on 1200 manufacturing enterprises including not only high-tech ones, but also medium-high, medium-low, and low-tech. Moreover, the project submitted for evaluation proposes a hybrid approach to the empirical investigation as it combines elements of exploration and explanation of the cooptition phenomena and assumes application of different, hence complementary methods and techniques of both qualitative and quantitative research.

Novelty, originality, and the need to undertake the research proposed under the project are based on four pillars. First, **the lack of knowledge**. Second, **the deficit of quantitative investigations** especially researches combining different approaches. Third, **the general lack of explanatory research based on advanced modeling methods**. Fourth, **the importance and relevance of cooptition for business practice**. Cooptition has been the subject of intensifying inquiries since the mid-1990s. However, the prior cognitive attention has focused mainly on the causes (drivers) of cooptition and its effects, whereas the latter were mostly boiled down into profitability and innovation outcomes. In the literature, *there is a lack of knowledge about cooptition per se, including the conceptual and empirical knowledge about the attributes of cooperative relationships as well as their life cycle*. The project will fill this knowledge gap.

Researches on cooptition are intensively conducted, although their empirical scope is very limited. So far, qualitative studies prevail. Simultaneously, the less frequently undertaken, quantitative ones are narrowed down to single industries and usually to the specific type or class of enterprises (mainly large and high-tech). The current stock of research achievements *lacks research allowing us to draw general conclusions and thus to make - at least fragmentary - generalizations*. The project will fill this empirical gap.

The scarcity of quantitative cooptition studies reveals a great deficit of research using advanced (giving more reliable and accurate results) analytical methods. Among exiting empirical investigations, *it is challenging to find works based on multivariate, moderated regressions, and even more so, models created as a result of structural modeling*. The project will fill this methodological gap.

Cooptition rapidly spreads in business practice. Prior findings show clearly that management (i.e., maintenance and effective exploitation) of cooperative relationships requires a relational capability and ongoing struggle with paradoxes, tensions, and complexity naturally rooted in cooperative relationships. Unfortunately, the literature *does not provide recommendations on how to shape/coordinate/manage these relationships, neither in terms of intentionally developing their features, their natural (or intentional?) variability throughout their life cycle, nor their importance for the multidimensional performance of cooptitors*. The project will fill this managerial gap.