

Conceptualizing Coopetition Strategy as Practice: A Multilevel Interpretative Framework

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Abstract: This study uses a strategy-as-practice approach to define coopetition strategy. Coopetition strategy forms, arguably, through the intersection of the organization's internal and external value networks, giving rise to simultaneous cooperative and competitive activities of a more or less intended nature. Four scenarios encompassing propositions are put forth to explain how coopetition strategy as a deliberate and emergent activity is manifested in the organization. By approaching coopetition from the strategy-as-practice perspective, current conceptualizations of its deliberate and emergent nature are unified under a common framework. The practice approach advances existing understandings of coopetition by shedding light on strategic actors and their actions at multiple levels, the social embedding of the strategic activities, and the dynamic nature of the strategy.

Keywords: Inter-competitor cooperation; coopetition; deliberate strategy; emergent strategy; strategy-as-practice

To understand organizational strategies, the strategy-as-practice stream has emphasized the importance of approaching strategy as something individuals do, rather than as something the organization has (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007, 6). Practice scholars argue that strategy arises out of social interactions, which occur between individual actors at multiple organizational levels as well as in the external environment (Golsorkhi et al. 2010, 7; Regné 2008, 568; Whittington 2006, 621). Such a conceptualization of strategy formulation corresponds to the ever growing importance played by networks (Parkhe, Wasserman, and Ralston 2006, 560). Moreover, within the external-facing value network, explanations on how the organization creates value through cooperation have progressively extended beyond interactions with suppliers, customers, partners, and the community (Allee 2008, 6) to include competitors as well (Ritala 2012; Solitander and Tidström 2010). Against the notion that two organizations are collaborative partners in some activities simultaneously as they compete in others, coopetition has been raised as a prerequisite for any network to be efficient (Bengtsson, Eriksson, and Kock 2005) and yet also as an organizational challenge (Bonel and Rocco 2009; Tidström 2009; Yami, Castaldo, Dagnino, Le Roy and Czakon 2010).

As a value creation strategy, coopetition exists at the intersection of the organization's internal value network, encompassing interactions between members within the organization and its external-facing value network (Allee 2008, 6). Consequently, in addition to cooperation advantages stemming from mutual interactions between two or more competitors, the value created embraces competition advantages that originate in the competitors' drive to out-perform each other and in their intraorganizational interactions (Bengtsson, Eriksson and Wincent 2010a, 208; Yami et al. 2010, 2). To refine coopetition strategy as a concept, the importance of incorporating both deliberate and emergent features has been emphasized (Dagnino and Rocco 2009, 292; Kylänen and Rusko 2011; Mariani 2007; Tidström 2008).

To approach this call, there is a need to go further in the analysis of the theoretical elements underpinning coopetition as a deliberate and emergent strategy; as such, a discussion is currently absent. Moreover, to date, there has been little research conceptualizing coopetition strategy as an activity, that is, how the formulation and implementation take place within the organization (Tidström 2008, 215; Yami et al. 2010, 7). Hence, in filling these gaps, this article seeks to develop a framework that explains how and why coopetition strategy as a deliberate and emergent activity is formulated and implemented by individuals at the intra- and interorganizational levels.

The purpose of this study is to define coopetition strategy as an activity from a strategy-as-practice perspective. The value of the practice approach lies in its ability to grasp both deliberate and emergent features of the strategy and to conceptualize it as an activity occurring in the organization alongside the interactions with competitors and the institutional environment (see Jarzabkowski 2005, 40, 43; Tsoukas 2010, 57; Vaara and Whittington 2012, 287). To explain the link between everyday activities of the individuals and the organization's value creation strategy, deliberate or not, scholars have stressed the centrality of exploring three interrelated theoretical elements (Whittington 2006, 615, 619; see also Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007; Regnér 2008). These elements, which constitute strategy as an activity, embrace shared norms for acting (practices), actual activities (praxis), and individuals involved in these activities (practitioners) (Whittington 2006, 615, 619). Thus, to achieve the purpose of the study, we develop a framework that outlines the deliberate and emergent nature of coopetition through practices, praxis, and practitioners at the intra- and interorganizational levels. According to the foundation for this framework and current coopetition strategy research, four different scenarios encompassing propositions outline how coopetition strategy as an activity is manifested in the organization.

The contribution of this study to the coopetition strategy field permeates three main areas. First, as the strategy-as-practice approach focuses on the actual influence of all individuals involved in strategic activities (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, 69-70; Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003, 5, 14; Regnér 2008, 570; Vaara and Whittington 2012, 309), insights are provided into the importance of strategic actors across multiple organizational levels in formulating and implementing a coopetition strategy (Golsorkhi et al. 2010, 1).

Second, the practice approach emphasizes the role that social embeddings, structures, and interactions play in the strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, 82; Regnér 2008, 570, 573; Whittington 2006). In this way, the social nature of coopetition is illuminated, thus explaining how the strategy is manifested internally in the organization and externally in the intercompetitor relationship. A link between the intra- and interorganizational levels of analysis is, therefore, also established.

Last, the strategy-as-practice approach serves as a tool for unifying current conceptualizations of coopetition as a strategy under a general framework. Through its assumption on strategy as “a reality in flux” (Golsorkhi et al. 2010, 7), it supports notions of coopetition as a dynamic phenomenon (Yami et al. 2010, 6) and of the simultaneous existence and interplay between deliberate and emergent features associated with the strategy (Dagnino and Rocco 2009, 292; Kylänen and Rusko 2011, 201; Mariani 2007, 120; Tidström 2008, 215).

The discussion is structured as follows. In view of existing coopetition research, the article sets out to approach the strategy as an activity by explaining the character and formation of strategy practices, praxis, and practitioners in an intercompetitor context. Hereafter, the deliberate and emergent features of coopetition strategy at the intra- and interorganizational levels of analysis are outlined in conjunction with prior coopetition strategy research. This analysis leads to the presentation of four approaches that explain how coopetition strategy as an activity is manifested in the organization.

A STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE APPROACH TO COOPETITION

This article focuses on coopetition as an interorganizational strategy. Accordingly, strategy formulation and implementation at an intraorganizational level is discussed in relation to the existence of coopetition between organizations. Moreover, coopetition is defined as “a process based upon simultaneous and mutual cooperative and competitive interactions” (Bengtsson, Eriksson, and Wincent 2010a, 200) between two or more companies engaged in the same line of business (Bengtsson and Kock 2000, 415).

Defining Coopetition Strategy

From a practice approach, strategy has been defined as a “socially accomplished activity” (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007, 7). The activities arise out of actions and interactions between different individual actors (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007, 8) involved in formulating and/or implementing the strategy (Whittington 2006, 619). Moreover, the activities constituting the strategic concept have been delineated as activities that are consequential for the direction of the organization in either a planned or unintended way (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007, 8; see also Johnson, Melin, and Whittington 2003; Regnér 2008; Vaara and Whittington 2012). This definition of strategy encompasses, on the one hand, deliberate strategic activities where intentions underlie strategy formulation and implementation (Mintzberg and Waters 1985, 259). On the other hand, the strategic activities undertaken by the individuals may also be of an emergent and unconscious nature, and, thus, only in retrospect will they form some type of pattern or consistency (Tsoukas 2010, 49; see also Mintzberg and Waters 1985).

Following the definition offered by Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl (2007, 7–8), a coopetition strategy consists of more or less intended cooperative and competitive activities that are consequential for the direction of the intercompetitor relation and, ultimately, for the organization. Cooperative activities arise out of mutual interactions between individuals at the interorganizational level. Simultaneously, competitive activities stem from interactions occurring among organizational members at an intraorganizational level. The interplay between these two types of activities, which results in the simultaneous existence of mutual value creation

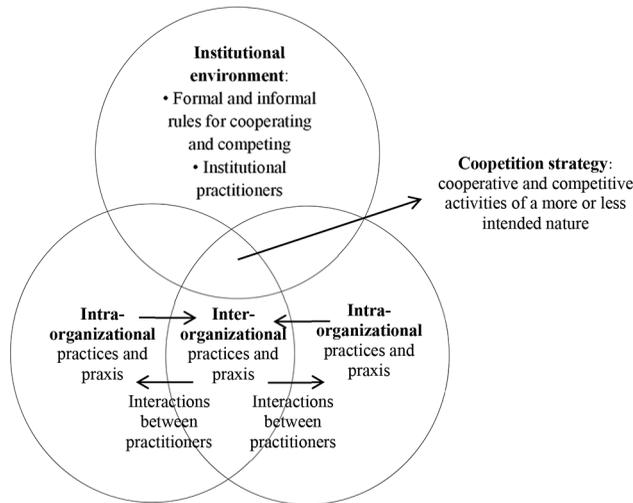


FIGURE 1 Coopetition strategy as an activity.

and the competitors’ individual use of the common benefits created, lies at the core of coopetition as a strategy (Gnyawali and Park 2011; Ritala and Hurmelinna-Laukkanen 2013).

To explain the underpinnings of this interplay, the attention is consistent with the practice approach (Whittington 2006, 615), directed at three interrelated concepts underlying organizational strategy as an activity. These are shared norms for acting (practices) alongside strategy formulation and implementation activities (praxis). The actors (practitioners) engaging in these practices and performing the strategic activities are, through their continuous interactions, central to maintaining and reforming the strategy. Consequently, as shown in Figure 1, coopetition strategy lies at the intersection of two or more competing organizations’ practices, praxis, and practitioners, and the institutional environment. Through interorganizational interaction, cooperative and competitive activities of a more or less intended nature are formed. The three strategic elements of practices, praxis, and practitioners are described in more detail below.

Coopetitive Strategy Practices and Praxis at the Intra- and Interorganizational Levels

Within the strategy-as-practice approach, practices refer to intangible formal and informal shared norms and accepted ways of how to think and act, which individuals draw upon when making and executing the strategy (Whittington 2006, 619–620; Vaara and Whittington 2012, 287). Following the assumption of the practice approach, how individuals act is determined by conceptions of legitimate ways of acting (Golsorkhi et al. 2010, 3; Vaara and Whittington 2012, 287). Practices incorporate the using of strategic planning procedures, such as workshops, budgets, analytical tools, and formal documents, but they also entail the influence of the social system on the strategic activities (for a full review, see Vaara and Whittington 2012). These practices, in turn, underlie strategy praxis, which is defined as the formal and informal everyday activities related to the formulation and implementation of strategy (Whittington 2006, 619). Because individuals always act within a context, praxis cannot be separated from the social

practices from which individuals draw (Vaara and Whittington 2012, 288; see also Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, 82; Tsoukas 2010, 49). Thus, strategy practices and praxis together constitute the actual strategic activities. In coopetitive relations, these strategic activities may attain a cooperation-dominated, competition-dominated, or a more equal nature (Bengtsson and Kock 2000; Bengtsson, Eriksson, and Wincent 2010a).

Drawing on Vaara and Whittington (2012, 288), the formulation and implementation of coopetition strategy are illustrated as residing in a “web of social practices.” Starting from the institutional level (see Figure 1), practices embrace general rules and norms for competing in the market. Here, informal and widespread “rules of conduct” (Easton 1990, 61), or “rules of play” (Bengtsson and Kock 1999, 181), have been argued to underlie the behavior of competitors toward each other. Under the assumption that practices are interlinked (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, 81), these institutional norms are intertwined with relation-specific norms guiding the interaction of two or more competitors. Relation-specific practices may take on a formal, explicit, and contractual nature, or they may be based on implicit and informal trust-based understandings (Bengtsson and Kock 1999, 181; Easton 1990, 73).

The interaction processes that emerge when practitioners of two organizations begin to interact, based on certain institutional and relation-specific practices, underlie coopetition strategy formulation and implementation (see Figure 1). Accordingly, strategic activities can be distinguished both at the inter- and intraorganizational levels. At the interorganizational level, the competitors mutually engage in activities to formulate, reformulate, and implement their cooperative activities and mutual value creation. At the intraorganizational level, strategic activities, in terms of leveraging mutual benefits (Gnyawali and Park 2011, 658) and the creation of individual benefits (Khanna, Gulati, and Nohria 1998), come into focus through a coopetitive value creation logic (Mariani 2007) and mindset (Gnyawali and Park 2009, 2011). Other intraorganizational activities may include balancing and managing tensions between cooperative and competitive interactions (Gnyawali and Park 2011, 652) as well as separating the interaction processes between different individuals (Bengtsson and Kock 2000).

Coopetitive Strategy Practitioners at the Intra- and Interorganizational Levels

Strategy practitioners are defined as individual actors “who do the work of making, shaping and executing strategies” internally at different organizational levels as well as in the external environment (Whittington 2006, 619; see also Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009). External coopetitive practitioners (see Figure 1) are institutional actors and associations that influence the cooperative activities through requirements and support (Bengtsson and Kock 2000; Kylänen and Rusko 2011; Mariani 2007; Okura 2007; Tidström 2009) or through the formation of legitimate practices (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008, 102). Internal coopetitive practitioners embrace organizational members engaged in the formulation of the cooperative and competitive activities. Internal practitioners also extend to members implementing and performing these activities within the firm or through participation in the intercompetitor interactions.

At an intraorganizational level of analysis, strategy-as-practice research has recognized actors beyond top management as having an influence on strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, 69-70; Vaara and Whittington 2012, 309). Existing coopetition studies have often outlined executives at higher organizational levels as coopetitive practitioners, formulating and managing the interplay

TABLE 1
 Overview of the Deliberate and Emergent Nature of Strategy Practices, Praxis and Practitioners

<i>Strategy elements</i>	<i>Deliberate</i>	<i>Emergent</i>
Practices: Shared norms for acting <i>Intra-organizational cooperative practices:</i> Norms for how to individually act toward the competitor <i>Inter-organizational cooperative practices:</i> Shared institutional/industry-based norms or relation-specific norms for how to compete and cooperate with the competitor	Origin: Rational planning, analysis, and choice Nature: Static, due to the assumption that: a) long-term predictions can be made about the environment b) long-term strategic coherence can be achieved through formal planning	Origin: Environmental and organizational forces Nature: Dynamic and adaptable
Praxis: Formal/informal activities <i>Intra-organizational cooperative praxis:</i> Individual strategy formulation and implementation activities <i>Inter-organizational cooperative praxis:</i> Mutual strategy formulation and implementation activities	Nature: Static Formulation: Formal top management activities Implementation: Implemented as planned	Nature: Dynamic and adaptable Formulation: Adaption to the environment and/or organization (middle-up, middle-down) Implementation: Not always implemented as planned → reformulation of practices and praxis
Practitioners: Strategic actors: top, middle, operational or external actor <i>Intra-organizational cooperative practitioners:</i> Internal actor involved in the formulation and/or implementation of the cooperative and competitive activities <i>Inter-organizational cooperative practitioners:</i> External actor involved in shaping the cooperative and competitive activities between the competitors	Origin: Internal or external Nature: Rational and calculated Level: Top management or external actors	Origin: Internal and external Nature: Flexible Level: Top, middle management, operation actors, or external actors

Sources: Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Whittington 2001, 2006.

(2007) coopetition strategy is argued to consist of both deliberate and emergent features. As shown in Table 1, we approach this view by first depicting the deliberate and emergent perspectives separately.

Coopetition as a Planned Practice

As a planned practice (see Figure 2), deliberate features, in terms of goal-orientation and intension, characterize strategic activities at the intra- and interorganizational levels (Mintzberg and Waters 1985, 257). This conceptualization of coopetition as a planned and directed strategy (Dagnino and Rocco 2009, 292; Kylänen and Rusko 2011, 194; Tidström 2008, 212), both in the organization's internal and external value networks, rests upon two key assumptions. Internally, shared understandings and direct adoption of detailed and articulated intensions exist at different actor levels, thus enabling the realization of the strategy as intended (Mintzberg and Waters 1985, 259). In addition, the organization has the ability, as a result of planning, to predict and control the influence of the external environment (Mintzberg and Waters 1985, 258; Whittington 2001, 3).

In this scenario, rationality and quest for efficiency play a central role in the formulation of a coopetition strategy (Whittington 2001, 11, 26). Within the theoretical perspectives associated with a deliberate view, this rationality has generally been depicted to stem from acting in line with either profit maximization goals or with the social system in which the organization operates and is embedded (Whittington 2001, 3-4). In existing coopetition research, profit maximization has often been regarded as an underlying element of managerial rationality. From a game theory approach, such notions become evident in the assumption that actors are able to assess the elements of the strategic game and possibly change the rules of the game in the market (see Brandenburger and Nalebuff 1995). Here, the focal intentions and strategic activities of the organization are superior to the mutual activities it shares with competitors (Brandenburger and Nalebuff 1995; Okura 2007). Accordingly, the nature of the coopetitive practices build on a rationally chosen balance between cooperation and competition (Whittington 2001, 14), which is preset and calculated at the outset of the coopetition strategy. Moreover, the practices underlying the interactions are based on predicting a competitive advantage from the intercompetitor relation by analyzing partner resources and capabilities alongside value creation and appropriation possibilities (Gnyawali and Park 2009: 320; see also Garraffo and Rocco 2009).

With this background, the strategic activities take on a more formal and rigid nature at both the intra- and interorganizational levels. Top management is recognized as prime practitioners controlling the competitive and cooperative activities through the deliberate construction of certain coopetitive practices and intentions (see Mintzberg and Waters 1985). The ability or mindset to perceive and manage opportunities for cooperating with a competitor is, thus, held and passed on first and foremost by executives (Gnyawali and Park 2011, 657; 2009, 324; Luo 2007, 143). In addition, whereas top management controls and possesses insights into the simultaneous existence of cooperation and competition, members at the operational level act and interact in accordance with either cooperative or competitive norms in the implementation stage (Herzog 2010, 210). Based on the preceding discussion, the following proposition is put forth to illustrate how coopetition strategy is manifested as a deliberate intra- and interorganizational activity:

Proposition 1: As a planned practice, coopetition strategy arises out of preformulated activities by top management at the outset, aligned with the focal organization's intentions.

Current studies have underscored the prevalence of some intentionality (Dagnino and Rocco 2009, 292), for example, with regard to the risks involved in cooperating with a competitor

(Tidström 2008, 214). Nevertheless, the need for recognizing unintentional features has also been raised (Bonel and Rocco 2009; Dagnino and Rocco 2009; Kylänen and Rusko 2011; Tidström 2008). Scholars using this stream of thought have conceptualized the control and prediction of coopetition as dynamic and challenging (Yami et al. 2010, 5). They have also acknowledged the influence of informal interactions, trust (Bengtsson and Kock 1999, 178; Castaldo and Dagnino 2009; Easton 1990, 73; Oliver 2004), and strategic learning processes (Mariani 2007). In response to this background, the value of integrating an emergent perspective arises.

Coopetition as an Adapting Practice

In viewing coopetition as an emergent strategy, the strategic activities form through spontaneous acts (Kylänen and Rusko 2011, 194), and without certain prearticulated intentions (Dagnino and Rocco 2009, 292; Tidström 2008, 212; see also Mintzberg and Waters 1985, 258), both within the organization and in its external value network (see Figure 2). In this scenario, the environment is assumed to be complex, dynamic, and challenging to predict. The market and the competition herein, rather than the top managers, underlie strategy formulation and reformulation through the market's power to determine the efficiency and success of the strategy (Whittington 2001, 16).

Consistent with this line of reasoning, scholars have outlined the strategic activities underlying coopetition as externally imposed by institutions (Kylänen and Rusko 2011; Mariani 2007). On the one hand, emergent interorganizational features have been acknowledged through elements of opportunism, occurring without order in the relation and causing continuous changes in cooperative and competitive activities (de Rond and Bouchikhi 2004). Czakon (2010, 69) shows, for example, how coopetition emerges as practitioners make assessments, while realizing a purely collaborative strategy. On the other hand, the strategic activities have been, in a similar vein, outlined to adapt to the development of trust (de Rond and Bouchikhi 2004) and the accumulation of socially embedded experiences among the competitors (Castaldo and Dagnino 2009).

In addition, the emergent perspective questions the value and possibility of the strategic activities to be controlled and realized as intended owing to intraorganizational complexity. The organization is assumed to consist of members with different experiences, roles (Levitt and March 1988, 325), and, ultimately, contrasting views (Jarzabkowski 2005, 64; see also Regnér 2003, 78). Consequently, strategy formulation and implementation are characterized by the bargaining among organizational members (Whittington 2001, 22), rather than a straightforward adoption of articulated intentions by top management. Simultaneously, the emergent perspective acknowledges the possible influence of informal strategic activities inherent in social processes contrasting formal ones (see e.g., Oliver 2004).

As a result of the assumed intra- and intercomplexity of the organization, the emergent view depicts strategy formulation and implementation as gradually emerging and discontinuous (Whittington 2001, 4). Mintzberg and Waters (1985, 270) further emphasize that in the emergent strategy, managers learn and adapt to the experiences created and leave room for organizational members to form and reform the content of the strategy along the way. Following these notions, learning and adaptation have been highlighted as two central themes underlying the development of cooperative strategic activities (Baumard 2009, 19;

Czakoń 2010, 60, 68; Mariani 2007). Moreover, scholars have stressed the strategic influence of operational actors and middle management, despite their lack of formal strategic roles (see Kylänen and Rusko 2011; de Rond and Bouchikki 2004). This latter notion relates to the common assumption of the studies assigned to this category (see Figure 2) that the formulation, implementation, and reformulation of coopetitive strategy practices become an intertwined and continuous process. The competitor's ability to adapt, be flexible and learn from partners, and react to instabilities is acknowledged throughout strategy formulation and implementation. Hence:

Proposition 2: As an adapting practice, coopetition strategy arises out of gradual and ad hoc activities stemming from continuous social influence.

Coopetition as a Reacting Practice

As a reacting practice, emergent features of the coopetition strategy prevail at the intraorganizational level alongside deliberate features at the interorganizational level (see Figure 2). Given the assumption that top management can predict and control its external environment, the cooperative and competitive activities are rationally planned in a top-down manner. The strategic activities are, thus, preceded by preformulated intentions pertaining, for example, to economic benefits, an improved strategic position, and access to skill (Bonel and Rocco 2009). Moreover, and similar to the planned scenario, the cooperative practices underlying the interactions between the competitors stem primarily from the focal organization. Support for such notions can be found in the strategic alliance literature. Herein, the formation of interorganizational practices has been explained in terms of "learning races" (Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad 1989; Khanna, Gulati, and Nohria 1998; Powell 1998). To this end, attention has been directed at competitive aspects and at the tensions, opportunistic behaviors, and knowledge appropriation concerns arising thereof (Das and Teng 2000; Khanna, Gulati, and Nohria 1998; see also Dussauge, Garrette, and Mitchell 2000).

On the one hand, complexity and delimited control by top management at the intraorganizational level signal the existence of emergent strategic activities underpinning the strategy. Alongside the deliberate nature, studies have acknowledged that the articulated intentions by top management may not be directly adopted due to the absence of a shared understanding, for example, of appropriate knowledge exchanges among operational actors (Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad 1989, 136). On the other hand, the aforementioned elements of self-interest underlie the emergent nature of the strategic activities at the intraorganizational level. The strategy is characterized by the existence of spontaneous reformulations of the preset mutual intentions by the focal organization, as the relation unfolds over time. Managers are consequently assigned the task to react and respond to unintended opportunities and challenges arising in the interorganizational interactions by formulating new practices and engaging new practitioners at the intraorganizational level (Bonel and Rocco 2009, 212).

These emergent features are further depicted by Khanna, Gulati, and Nohria (1998) through their emphasis on intraorganizational learning, which results in continuous reformulations of prevailing strategic activities. In view of the emphasis on learning, middle managers could become important players, mediating information to top management regarding interorganizational

activities. Nevertheless, this role remains indirect as, for example, Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad (1989, 138) suggest: "Learning begins at the top. ... But most learning takes place at the lower levels of an alliance." This discussion leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 3: As a reacting practice, coopetition strategy arises out of continuously reformulated activities by top and middle management against the articulated intentions agreed upon between the competitors.

Coopetition as a Contextually Derived Practice

As a contextually derived practice, coopetition is conceptualized as planned and directed in the organization's internal value network (see Figure 2). The organization's ability to plan and control the external environment is, however, delimited, giving rise to emergent features at the interorganizational level. This latter assumption is revealed through the acknowledgement of coopetition as an externally imposed value creation strategy. In the studies assigned to this scenario, coopetition, on the one hand, has been proposed to be socially and/or regionally embedded. For example, Choi, Garcia, and Friedrich (2010) show how the national business culture and strong friendship ties support the formation of cooperative relations. Lechner and Dowling (2003, 13) highlight, in turn, the influence of regional proximity on interorganizational practices, such as a cooperative attitude, trust, and reciprocal behavior. Scholars within this stream, on the other hand, have acknowledged the influence of consumers, competitors (Luo 2007), and institutional actors (Kylänen and Rusko 2011; Mariani 2007). Finally, research conceptualizing intercompetitor cooperation, in view of the network-based nature of the industry and in relation to the creation of the market or establishment of standards (Fjeldstad, Becerra, and Narayanan 2004; Ritala, Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, and Blomqvist 2009), also supports the notion of coopetition as an emergent strategy at the interorganizational level.

The deliberate nature is revealed through the assumption that top management becomes the key player in reformulating the cooperative and competitive activities in accordance with socially or environmentally imposed directions. This deliberateness, for example, can reveal itself through coopetition as an entrepreneurial strategy (Mintzberg and Waters 1985, 260). Here, the entrepreneur controls the organization and imposes certain articulated intentions on other members simultaneously, as the need to adapt to the external environment prevails (Dagnino and Mariani 2010, 107). Accordingly:

Proposition 4: As a contextually derived practice, coopetition strategy arises out of formulated activities by top management as a consequence of environmental changes and requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has set out to define coopetition strategy as an activity from a practice approach. The approach was adopted to provide a framework that explains how and why coopetition strategy, as a deliberate and emergent activity, is formulated and implemented internally in the organization, and, simultaneously, with respect to the intercompetitor relation. To understand the link between the actual activities of actors and coopetition as a value creation strategy, focus was directed at three elements underlying strategy. These were the actors with an influence on

strategy, the agreed ways of acting and interacting, and the actual strategy formulation and implementation activities. By distinguishing these elements, we explain how the organization's internal and external value networks intersect. Consequently, we depict how coopetition strategy arises out of the simultaneous existence of cooperative and competitive activities of a more or less intended nature. Depending on the deliberate or emergent nature of the strategic elements and their intra- or interorganizational origin, four scenarios of coopetition as a value creating strategy were presented.

The activities underpinning strategy as a planned practice were characterized by prediction, rationality, and formality through top management control. As an adapting practice, the strategic activities were illustrated to form gradually or ad hoc through social influence, flexibility, and learning at multiple organizational actor levels. In the two other scenarios, simultaneous deliberateness and emergence were depicted. As a reacting practice, strategic activities form in the organization through continuous reformulations of the articulated intentions agreed upon by the competitors. As a contextually derived practice, strategic activities emerge at the interorganizational level due to externally imposed changes or regulations, after which the role of top management's internal control is acknowledged.

Theoretical Implications

The strategy-as-practice approach advances our current understanding of coopetition strategy as a theoretical concept by approaching it as an activity. First, the approach puts particular focus on the actual effect of all individuals involved in and influencing strategic activities (Jarzabkowski and Spee 2009, 69–70; Johnson, Melin, and Whittington 2003, 5, 14; Regnér 2008, 570; Vaara and Whittington 2012, 309). In consequence, in addition to top management, other actors, such as middle managers, operational actors, and external actors, are incorporated in the definition of who constitutes a competitive practitioner.

Second, by approaching the social nature of strategy in terms of practitioner interactions in the internal and external networks, the simultaneous existence of cooperative and competitive interactions (Bengtsson and Kock 2000; Bengtsson, Eriksson, and Wincent 2010a) at multiple levels of analysis (Bengtsson, Eriksson & Wincent 2010b, 35) is embraced. Thus, the study takes the definition of coopetition strategy closer to its previously articulated features. Most important, by defining the competitive practitioners and the practices from which they draw, a link between actor involvement, at the microlevel, and coopetition as a value creating strategy, at the organizational level, is established (Whittington 2006, 615, 619; see also Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007, 10; and Regnér 2008, 566). The social nature of practices also illustrates the simultaneous influence that organizational and institutional level practices have on cooperative and competitive activities (Tsoukas 2010; see also Golsorkhi et al. 2010; Vaara and Whittington 2012) and, thus, on shaping a coopetition strategy.

Third, consistent with previous research, this study highlights the possibility of a coopetition strategy to assume both deliberate and emergent features (Dagnino and Rocco 2009, 292; Kylänen and Rusko 2011, 201; Mariani 2007, 120; Tidström 2008, 215). Particularly, emergent features, such as self-interest and opportunism of organizations, as well as environmental and continuous social influences on cooperative and competitive activities, provide insights into the dynamic nature of a coopetition strategy. Accordingly, the influence of informal and unplanned

interactions, both internally and in the intercompetitor relation, opens up the possibility for activities, not articulated as strategic at the outset, to be consequential for the strategy (Vaara and Whittington 2012, 310). As the scope of what constitutes strategic activities is broadened to include emergent activities alongside planned and controlled activities by top management, the strategy-as-practice approach serves to unify and advance existing coopetition research. The coooperative framework developed in this article could also contribute to the strategy-as-practice field by shedding light upon practitioners and emergent strategic activities in a new context.

Limitations and Future Research

An interesting avenue for future research could be to further explore the nature and development of coooperative practices and praxis at organizational, group, and individual levels, from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Furthermore, the focus on strategy could extend from the intraorganizational level to also embrace the influence of, and interaction between, practices and practitioners at an extra- or interorganizational level of analysis in coopetition research (Whittington 2006). A limitation of this study stems from its conceptual nature. It would be of value to investigate empirically how coooperative practices are actually expressed, developed, and communicated through strategy practices, such as discourse, formal documents, meetings, technological tools, and consulting tools (Jarzabkowski and Whittington 2008, 101).

The aspect of time has not been explicitly addressed in the article's discussion on how coopetition strategy is manifested in the organization. Hence, further research could explore this matter and provide a more holistic picture of coopetition as practice by exploring how the deliberate and emergent nature of strategic activities change as the coooperative relationship unfolds. Alternatively, research could focus specifically on the development of the coooperative practices and explore what type of practices dominate in the early stage of coooperative interactions and what type of practices are used in more mature intercompetitor relations stages. Research could also focus on how the strategic roles of coooperative practitioners in the organization change as the strategy process unfolds over time.

Another avenue for research, which was beyond the scope of this study, is to analyze the influence of the level of strength of the cooperative and competitive interactions in the relation. Consequently, a valid inquiry is to discover if competition-dominated practices and cooperation-dominated practices are constructed differently. At an intraorganizational level, it could be of interest to analyze and determine empirically if certain coooperative practices are boundary-spanning through different levels. In this way, future studies could explore if coopetition—as a new behavior that integrates cooperation and competition interaction logics—embraces the organization as whole or only parts of it. Finally, we hope the strategy-as-practice approach will spur additional future research paths to explore coopetition strategy as an activity.

NOTES

1. Depending on the level of deliberateness and emergence, Mintzberg and Waters (1985, 270) put forth, in addition to a purely deliberate and emergent strategy, six types of strategies. In explaining the simultaneous existence of a deliberate and emergent nature it remains, however, beyond the scope of the upcoming discussion to analyze and distinguish the degree of deliberateness and emergence.

2. The studies in Figure 2 have been selected as they provide theoretical and/or empirical insights into cooperative strategic activities. The categorization of the studies seeks to explore the support for the assumptions underlying the four scenarios and to exemplify these scenarios. It is, however, beyond the scope of this categorization to provide an in-depth review of each study and the study's potential applicability to several scenarios. It is also beyond the scope of this categorization to provide a review of the coopetition strategy literature as a whole.

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