

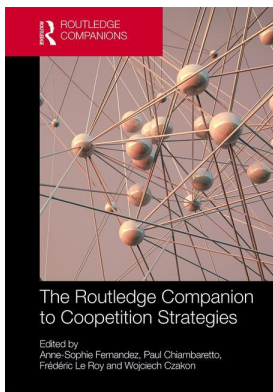
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Management tools for inter-network competition¹

Thuy Séran and Hervé Chappert

Introduction

Coopetition creates tensions that can be extremely strong and can jeopardize the effective pursuit of cooperation (Bonel & Rocco, 2007). Therefore, managing tensions is a critical task for cooperative organizations and an essential condition for achieving performance (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Chen, 2008; Raza-Ullah et al., 2014). Within the strategy field, researchers of cooperation investigate management tools to provide solutions that will reduce cooperative risks and tensions (Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Fernandez et al., 2014; Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Luo, 2007; Peng & Bourne, 2009; Seran et al., 2016), while within the management accounting field, authors focus on studies of inter-organizational cooperation, which include cooperative relationships (Dekker, 2016; Grafton & Mundy, 2016; Mouritsen & Thrane, 2006; van der Meer-Kooistra & Scapens, 2008). The purpose of this chapter is to combine management accounting and strategy approaches in a discussion about cooperation management.

A literature review is conducted that combines two theoretical corpuses. At an organizational level, a consensus exists between the two approaches, even though the authors may use different terms to explain how formal and informal controls are mobilized to manage cooperative tensions. At a network level, cooperative and management accounting literatures offer general management principles, but they do not converge to explain how control mechanisms contribute to cooperation success (Czakon et al., 2014). Accordingly, we focus our research on a network, and we propose an integrative management accounting framework that can be applied to manage network cooperative tensions. This framework is illustrated by a detailed analysis of the cooperative network governance within the banking industry.

Levels of cooperative tensions

Given that cooperative tensions may come from several sources, Fernandez et al. (2014) develop a multi-level conceptual framework to understand key drivers of tension in cooperation and key approaches to managing that tension. We propose to aggregate cooperative tensions according to levels and sources involved to clarify the principles applied (Table 34.1).

Table 34.1 Coopetitive tensions and principles

Levels	Coopetitive Tensions			
	Personal	Organizational level (dual-level analysis)		Network level
	Inter-personal	Intra-organizational	Inter-organizational	Intra- and inter- network
Sources	Belonging to the parent firm and cooperative identity	Allocation of resources and creation of appropriation of business unit value	Value creation and knowledge sharing and learning	Resource and power asymmetry
Principles	Separation-integration and combining both separation and integration			Sponsorship or integration

At the individual level, partners face continual pressures to manage cooperative and competitive tensions that emerge from collaboration with competitors. Explicit and implicit strategic priorities may lead to different mindsets and behaviors with respect to managers (Fernandez et al., 2014) and, hence, belonging to opposing firms is a source of cognitive dissonance and psycho-cognitive stress for managers (Dekker, 2016; Seran et al., 2016).

At the intra-organizational level, units cooperate to simultaneously develop synergies and scale effects, while also competing for internal limited technological human and financial resources (Luo et al., 2006; Seran et al., 2016).

At the inter-organizational level, the first tension arises due to the confrontation between common value creation and private value appropriation (Gnyawali et al., 2012; Madhavan, 2012). A partner who increases his or her resources and competences so that they exceed those of his or her competitor will gain a competitive advantage in future competition. As a consequence, tensions may then appear when each partner attempts to capture the previously created value (Cassiman et al., 2009). The second conflict is due to the risks associated with the transfer of confidential information and the risks of technological imitation. Partners join strategic resources to achieve their goals (Gnyawali & Park, 2009). However, at the same time, they must protect their core competencies from their competitors. Sharing information with their competitors, in subtle ways over time, may introduce homogeneity into their products and reduce the distinctiveness of each firm (Grafton & Mundy, 2016). In some cases, regulatory risk could also be a source of tension, and when such tension appears, it is a particularly salient concern (Anderson et al., 2014). Indeed, any exchange of information between competitors exposes them to the risk of perceived or real collusion, and hence, potentially could result in their being subject to anti-competition legislation (Grafton & Mundy, 2016).

At the network level, competition intensifies as the life cycle advances toward maturity (Baum & Korn, 1996; Bettis & Hitt, 1995; Korn & Baum, 1999). Tensions are specific and more intense during this process given that members' interests may become more conflicted if the industry shrinks (Luo, 2007). The resources and power of each competitor structure the network and significantly influence coopetition (Ketchen et al., 2004).

While these principles appear meaningful conceptually, we know little about how to help a network manage the tensions in coopetition. Therefore, to deeply understand which mechanisms contribute to network coopetition success, we investigate an integrative management accounting framework and illustrate it using a banking industry case.

Banking inter-network competition

Cooperative banking, a part of the banking industry, is a perfect illustration of a network cooperative case. In Europe, cooperative banking is an important economic sector that offers access to more than 71,000 bank agencies and employs approximately 850,000 people (EACB, 2017). BP-CE² is the third important cooperative banking network in France and is classified as one among the top thirty systemic banks in the world by the Financial Stability Board.

In the last few decades, cooperative activities have become more frequent in the cooperative banking sector, for three reasons. The first is linked to the application of the 1984 Finance Act, which ended the privileges of cooperative banks, forcing them to diversify, acquire new skills, and make alliances with competitors through internal or external development. As a result, cooperative banks established cooperation within the same bank network or with competitor bank networks.

The second reason for the acceleration of the phenomenon of cooperation in the cooperative banking network is the impact of the international legal environment in the banking sector. To satisfy the criteria of prudential rules following the 2008 crisis, banks must now prove the viability of their business model, demonstrate their credit risk and their low risk of governance, and publish all relevant information (Bonomo et al., 2016).

The third reason is the digitalization of the banking sector, particularly considering that new entrants are major companies in information technology, e-retailing and media (Fintech). While these Fintech players are not yet competitors of banks, they offer targeted and more convenient services. Hence, corporate and investment banks, as well as retail banks, are now embracing cooperation by taking these Fintech players as new partners in their ecosystems.

In 2009, the Group Central Institution BP-CE founded a common board to manage the cooperative activities of the two networks, BP and CE (Figure 34.1).

Their competitive and cooperative activities are summarized in Table 34.2. These two networks include regional banks, which are independent banks competing in the areas of sales activities. In these two networks, Caisse d'Épargne (CE) and Banque Populaire (BP), competitive activities account for 64.5% of the total net banking income (traditional retail and commercial banking activities) and are conducted by eighteen banks in the BP network and seventeen in the CE network.

Cooperative activities and cooperative tensions

The cooperative activities of these two banking networks include a shared information system, three common management funds and the joint representation of external actors (customers, financial markets, government, financial regulators). These activities are monitored by two organizations, namely the IT group central institution and the group central institution.

IT system tensions

Some tensions are created by shared information technology systems (IT systems). Initially, both networks had their own information system, but in 2015 they decided to jointly manage a new shared information system. The objectives behind this collaboration in digitalizing their banking activities were mainly to reduce IT costs and time to market, and to consolidate their network expertise and competencies. While the IT Group Central Institution was created to manage this cooperative activity, once the integration strategy was defined and approved by the IT Group Central Institution, common strategy reduced the regional banks' bargaining powers

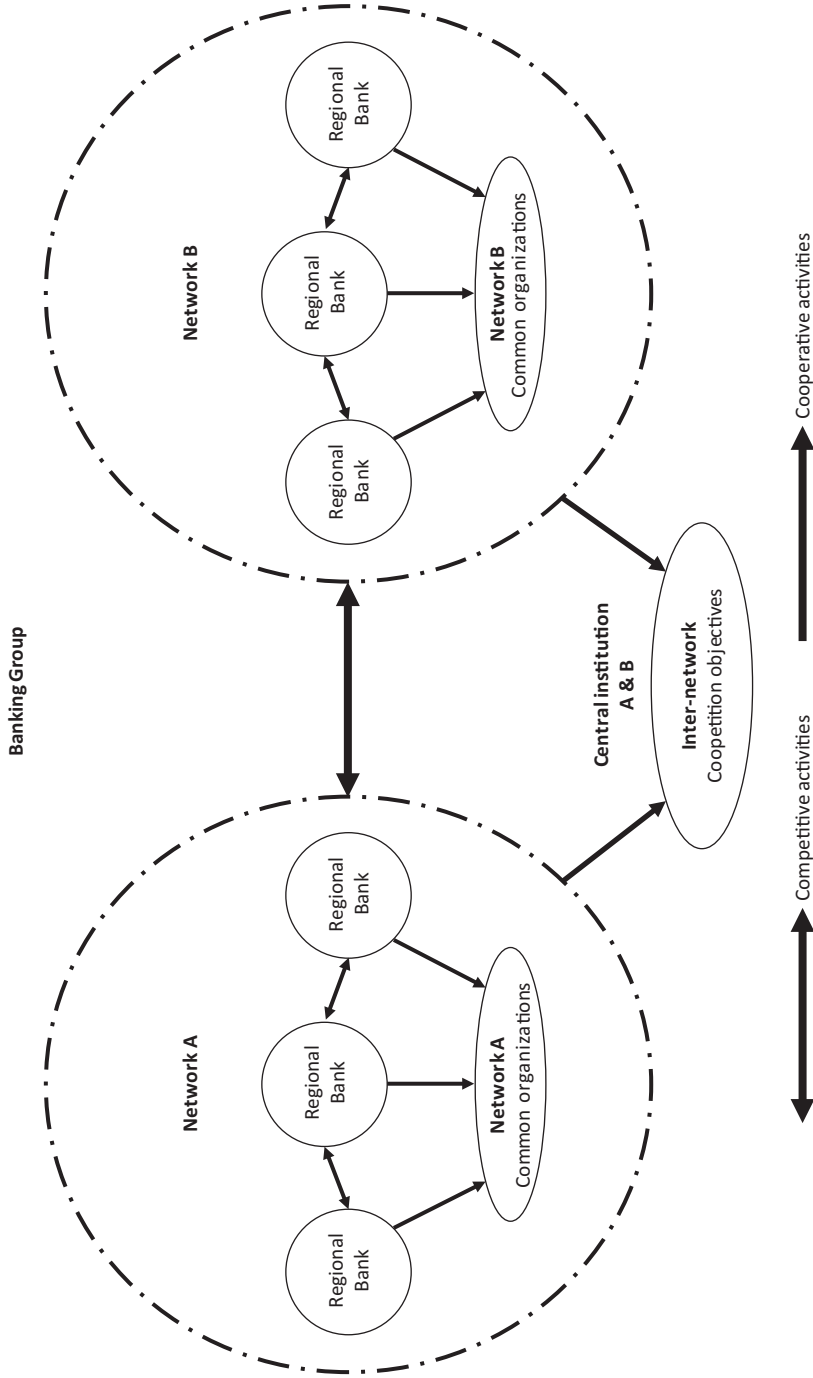


Figure 34.1 BP-CE cooperative and competitive activities

Table 34.2 Cooperative and competitive activities

Competitive activities (65% of net banking income)	Banking products sales
Cooperatives activities	Common information system management Regulatory risk management Networks representation activities

and freedom of choice. Consequently, tension appeared as banks compared the costs of their contributions to this common project to the gains in terms of knowledge and customer data.

Risk management tensions

Tensions could also be created by regulatory risk management. In addition to their own fund management system, the two networks created a second common governance board, namely the Group Central Institution, to manage global cooperative strategies, mutual funds and prudential compliance. Thus, since 2009, the global network financial risk has been supported by a common fund, the Fonds de Garantie Mutuel (FGM), in which the BP network and the CE network have each deposited €180 million.

The objective of common funds is to ensure coherence, solvency, and liquidity for the two banking networks and their subsidiary, Natixis. Therefore, the operating rules regarding these common funds establish the terms and conditions for member contributions. Although these mechanisms were originally established under a mutualist reinsurance approach, this solidarity, perceived as the distinctive value of cooperatives, creates tensions. For Natixis, in past crises, the equity and liquidity of all the banks in the two networks were called upon to financially support Natixis' risky activities. This solidarity placed the two cooperative networks in a difficult situation and, as a consequence, their opening-up to the stock market resulted in tensions between the Group Central Institution and the listed subsidiary with all the banks in the two networks. Indeed, using of external capital considerably increase the cost of financing cooperatives and increase the need for profitability of their activities.

The Group Central Institution is also responsible for prudential consolidation, which is a consolidation of the financial risks and the performance of the two networks to fit financial prudential standards requirements. This financial consolidation brings together the balance sheets of the independent banks that belong to the two networks to offset the risks and performances of these banks. As the two banking networks include independent regional banks whose competitive advantages and individual risks depend strongly on the economy of the territory, they must engage in financial consolidation to compensate for the risks. However, the prudential consolidation creates tensions among the regional banks since the regional banks must provide more relevant information, such as financial statements, in accordance with prudential rules to avoid the exclusion of the network.

Networks representation tensions

At last, tensions could be created by networks representation activities. The Group Central Institution represents regional banks and negotiates and signs national and international agreements on their behalf. It also manages their interests and establishes cooperative banking network strategy (Moody, 2016: 18). However, because conflict arises between cooperative and

shareholder values due to the diversity of the two networks' property structures (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001), it is becoming increasingly more difficult for the Group Central Institution to ensure the cohesion of the network and defend mutualist values (democracy and solidarity). Furthermore, the tension between the BP and CE cooperative networks and Natixis is due to the shared common fund and the opposition in value between the network's actors, i.e., capitalist values for Natixis and cooperative values for the rest of the network. Cooperative network banks are owned and governed by their members such that each member clearly holds a vote in the democratic process in accordance with the one-person-one-vote democratic principle. The ideal cooperative bank seeks to maximize the benefits of its members (who are also customers) and maximize consumer bonuses. However, with respect to Natixis, even if it is a subsidiary of BP and CE, it has a shareholder logic whereby maximizing the rate of return on capital is, if not the exclusive, at least the dominant business objective.

Management accounting tools

To manage tensions within a cooperative inter-network we have to understand the role of management accounting in a cooperative network. As summarized in Table 34.1, separation, integration, and combining are the three principles employed to manage tensions at the individual and organizational levels. At the network level, resources and power depend on centrality, property structure, and network density (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001), and two principles are identified to manage cooperative tensions—sponsorship and integration (Luo, 2007). Sponsorship refers to the effort to “pacify the volatility of steep rivalry among competitors,” to “establish collaborative opportunities and platforms for members to share complementary resources,” and to “create more favorable conditions” such as “competitive pressures from new entrants and substitutes and bargaining power from suppliers and buyers or government policies and international treaties” (Luo, 2007). Luo (2007) shows that integration is an effort to put a firm's cooperation scheme under a unified and coordinated umbrella to better nurture the implementation of this global strategy to establish a well-coordinated cooperation program and prioritize the role played by each member.

While knowledge about principles is acknowledged, little is known about the tools to use. Management control mechanisms include a control system design that is based primarily on an information system used to share information and governance. Additionally, it encompasses performance measurement systems, such as goal setting, incentive systems, and performance monitoring, and involves process or behavioral control, social control, and informal control (Table 34.3). These control mechanisms must first be clarified from a perspective that will facilitate their use in a network with complex cooperative and competitive relationships.

At the organizational level, both cooperative and management accounting literatures agree on the role of formal and informal control as tools to manage cooperative tensions. Several studies have emphasized that formal and informal control mechanisms do not work separately and must be combined to manage tensions between partners and increase alliance performance (de Man & Roijakkers, 2009; Faems et al., 2008). Seran et al. (2016) provide an in-depth study of leading French banking institutions to unveil how formal and informal management helps individuals cope with cooperation tensions. Accordingly, their study develops the paradox integration thread of thinking through a scrutiny of various practices implemented to alleviate tensions. Fernandez & Chiambaretto (2016) suggest that the management of tensions related to information in cooperative projects requires a combination of formal control mechanisms, i.e., information criticality, and informal control mechanisms, i.e., information appropriation, both of which are designed to foster the success of a common project while limiting the risk of opportunism (Das & Teng, 2001).

Table 34.3 Synthesis of management control mechanism and tools

<i>Management control mechanisms</i>	<i>Tools</i>
Inter-organizational management controls systems design	Design of tasks, information sharing, information technology
Performance measurement systems	Goal setting, incentive systems, performance monitoring, and executive rewards
Process controls	Rules, regulations, structures, job descriptions, reporting structures
Behavioral control, social control, informal control	Trust, socialization processes, values

At the network level, both coepetitive and management accounting insist on the role of formal contract and informal social mechanisms, such as trust, shared norms, implicit sanctions, and symbolic communication (Caglio & Ditillo, 2008; Dekker, 2016; Peng & Bourne, 2009). These mechanisms lead to increased cognitive salience of competitors as well as to mutual coordination. Indeed, formal contracts, which are often incomplete, are performed with other mechanisms, such as informal social control (Anderson et al., 2014). Informal self-enforcing agreements between firms, i.e., relational contracts, rely on a range of social and other relationship-based control mechanisms and are sustained by the expected value of the future relationship (Baker et al., 2002).

More specifically, a network, because of its lack of central authority, exercises control through the installation of a governance board that is characterized by joint authority, monitoring, and decision making (Dekker, 2004). This form of hierarchy, however, results in decision making and conflict resolution being subject to inter-firm communications and negotiations. In this sense, the design and implementation of management control is also subject to negotiation and approval by partners' executives. The management accounting resulting from these negotiations is a mix of mechanisms and practices that are meant to serve the interests of the various partners rather than those of a single firm. Another difference between the inter-firm and the intra-firm settings is the role of arbitrators in the event of relationship failures or conflicts. This role also results from the absence of a complete hierarchy, and thus adds other parties to the relationship that are not present within the firm (Dekker, 2016).

Although both the coepetitive and the management accounting literature propose tools to manage coepetitive tensions at the network level, there remains a lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Simons (1995) developed a theoretical framework that aims to frame a strategic area, establish and create a strategy, develop opportunities and focus on managing multiple tensions. This framework links business strategy, including the alliance strategy, and system control management to balance tensions (Figure 34.2). Simons' framework includes four managerial control levels: (1) beliefs systems; (2) boundary systems; (3) diagnostic control systems; and (4) interactive control systems.

Cooperative strategic area

The beliefs control system is "the explicit set of organizational definitions that senior managers communicate formally and reinforce systematically to provide basic values, purpose, and direction." This formal communication style provides basic shared values and direction for

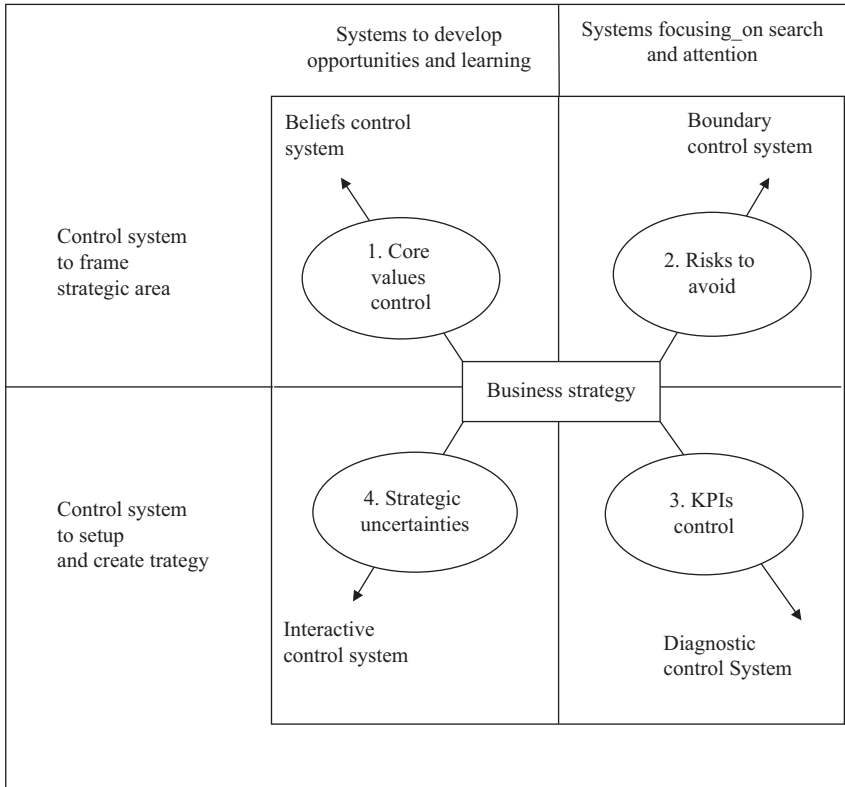


Figure 34.2 Interrelation levels of control with strategy, opportunity, and attention

inter-coopetitive networks and relies on relational contracting to establish credible commitments among firms (Grafton & Mundy, 2016). This system is presented as behavioral control, social control, and informal control in Table 34.3. Specifically, the Group Central Institution as a network representative organization makes extensive use of shared values, group norms, meetings, informal gatherings, partner selection, restricted access, and the threat of collective sanctions to manage various relational and decision risks associated with coopetitive activities. Dependence and repeated exchanges between partners can reduce opportunistic behaviors because any firm that operates against the norms of the group potentially faces the threat of being excluded from other collaborative activities critical to their survival as an independent bank.

The boundary control system is defined as “the acceptable domain of strategic activity for organizational participants, through communicating, implementing and enforcing codes of business conduct.” As such, it outlines the acceptable domain of the banking business model, including credit risk and security, for inter-coopetitive networks and is presented in Table 34.3 as an inter-organizational management controls systems design. Concretely, the Group Central Institution oversees the global coopetitive activities of the two networks through the implementation of a three- to five-year strategic plan voted on by both banking networks and the strengthening of internal control. As part of its supervisory role, the Group Central Institution has the power to dismiss and replace the top managers from among the network members (e.g., regional banks) if they fail to comply with its directives or banking regulations. A strong internal

merger has occurred in recent years within the regional banks of these networks, either for economy of scale or in the event that they were not sufficiently profitable.

Cooperative strategy

We propose to set up and create cooperative strategy through diagnostic and interactive control systems. The diagnostic control system is designed “to ensure the implementation of intended strategies and the achievement of planned outcomes, allowing the managers to monitor the activity of employees or partner’s organizations through the review of critical performance cooperative variables” and is represented by the performance measurement systems and process controls in Table 34.3. The system includes budget and reporting and allows feedback of cooperative networks (Table 34.4).

The interactive control system is based on “the personal involvement and interest of managers in the critical elements of strategy design and implementation, creating an ongoing dialogue with subordinates and partners, and actively finding of best solutions for the identified problems” and controls inter-cooperative networks with the use of formal tools in an interactive way. For example, the implementation of cost allocation control systems in the annual budget is managed via an interactive control system through the informal internal networks that are inter-related and embedded one in another (Seran et al., 2016). This control is effective because, on the one hand, cooperative banking networks are characterized by an information asymmetry between member-owners (shareholders) and managers that is much stronger than in conventional banking networks. The limitation of the ownership rights of the members and, in particular, the weak correlation between dividend and bank’s performances, weakens their incentive to control the managers.

Table 34.4 Integrative management accounting framework for banking network cooperative tensions management

<i>Inter-network Competition Activities</i>	<i>Cooperative Tensions</i>	<i>Control Mechanisms & Tools</i>	<i>Simons’ Levers of Control</i>
Common information system management	Tension created in IT activities management	Cost allocation and annual budget	Diagnostic and interactive control system
	Tension created by knowledge sharing	Specific governance structures through role and task sharing	Diagnostic and interactive control system
Regulatory risk management	Tension in the management of mutual funds and the joint subsidiaries taking more financial risks	Five-year strategic plan; internal audit control	Boundary control system
	Tensions created by comparing IT performance and IT risks between regional banks	Global network consolidated reporting/ IT—internal audit control	Diagnostic control system
Networks representation activities	Representation equilibrium between cooperative values and shareholder values	Decision system (equity, interdependence); democracy; solidarity	Beliefs control system; interactive control system

On the other hand, the dilution of control and the weak link between capital ownership and the composition of management bodies reinforce discretionary managerial power and organizational inefficiency that can include overstaffing, lack of penalties for incompetence, lack of motivation to reduce operating costs and improve productivity, excessive remuneration, existence of free cash flows and creation of high reserves (Akella & Greenbaum, 1988; Mayers & Smith, 1994). However, the discretionary power of regional banking managers is limited by the risk of being closed or merged by a collective decision and by the existence of an internal labor market in which managers must preserve their reputations (informal control system). These informational asymmetries favor the development of informal interactive control through the networks of senior executives.

Conclusions: Contributions and research agenda

Combining both coepetition and management accounting literatures is necessary to build an integrative management accounting framework for network coepetition. Simons (1995, 1999) posits that effective control is achieved by integrating the four levers of control, since “the power of these levers in implementing strategy does not lie in how each is used alone, but rather in how they complement each other when used together. The interplay of positive and negative forces creates a dynamic tension.” Simons also states that beliefs and interactive controls create positive energy and that boundary and diagnostic controls create negative energy as they assess planned objectives. From our case study, this equilibrium produced good results in terms of cost and income synergies according to our financial data analysis from the beginning of the alliance to 2013. Moreover, financial performance also exhibited good results and risks were reduced. The performances were driven by boundary and diagnostic control systems, i.e., negative energy. However, these systems have some limits linked to the specificities of cooperative banks, which sometimes make them ineffective. Hence, they are completed with beliefs control systems and interactive control systems, i.e., positive energy. A perfect example of the interaction of beliefs and interactive control systems was demonstrated in the cooperative banking case presented above. Whereas management accounting literature contributes by advancing knowledge on the coepetition phenomenon by providing structured coepetitive management tools, management accounting is perceived as coepetitive strategic alignment by incorporating the tools as concrete actions and performance measurements. Concretely, the integrative framework proposed (Figure 34.3) as a management tool facilitates the achievement of the following four objectives: (1) frame the coepetitive strategy area using the definition of shared value to obtain commitment to the coepetitive purpose, i.e., belief system, and to design the network governance and risk management to stake out the territory, i.e., boundary system; (2) establish a strategy based on the performance measurement, i.e., diagnostic system, and create competition through the positioning of the uncertainty environment, i.e., interactive system; (3) focus on research based on the definition of risk domain; and (4) develop new opportunities and learning within the coepetitive network.

Conversely, coepetition enriches management accounting literature by developing emerging literature on the boundaries between intra-firm and inter-firm management accounting (Dekker, 2016) and on the horizontal relationships network among competitors. Moreover, coepetitive tensions appearing during the time span of the inter-firm management accounting literature consume the whole-time span of coepetition studies (Czakon et al., 2014). However, as these tensions remain under-examined in management accounting literature (Grafton & Mundy, 2016), the topic provides interesting opportunities for future studies.

First, the new institutionalist theory can be a paradoxical approach for coepetitive networks as their members may belong to a hybrid organization or a meta-organization that has different institutional logics.

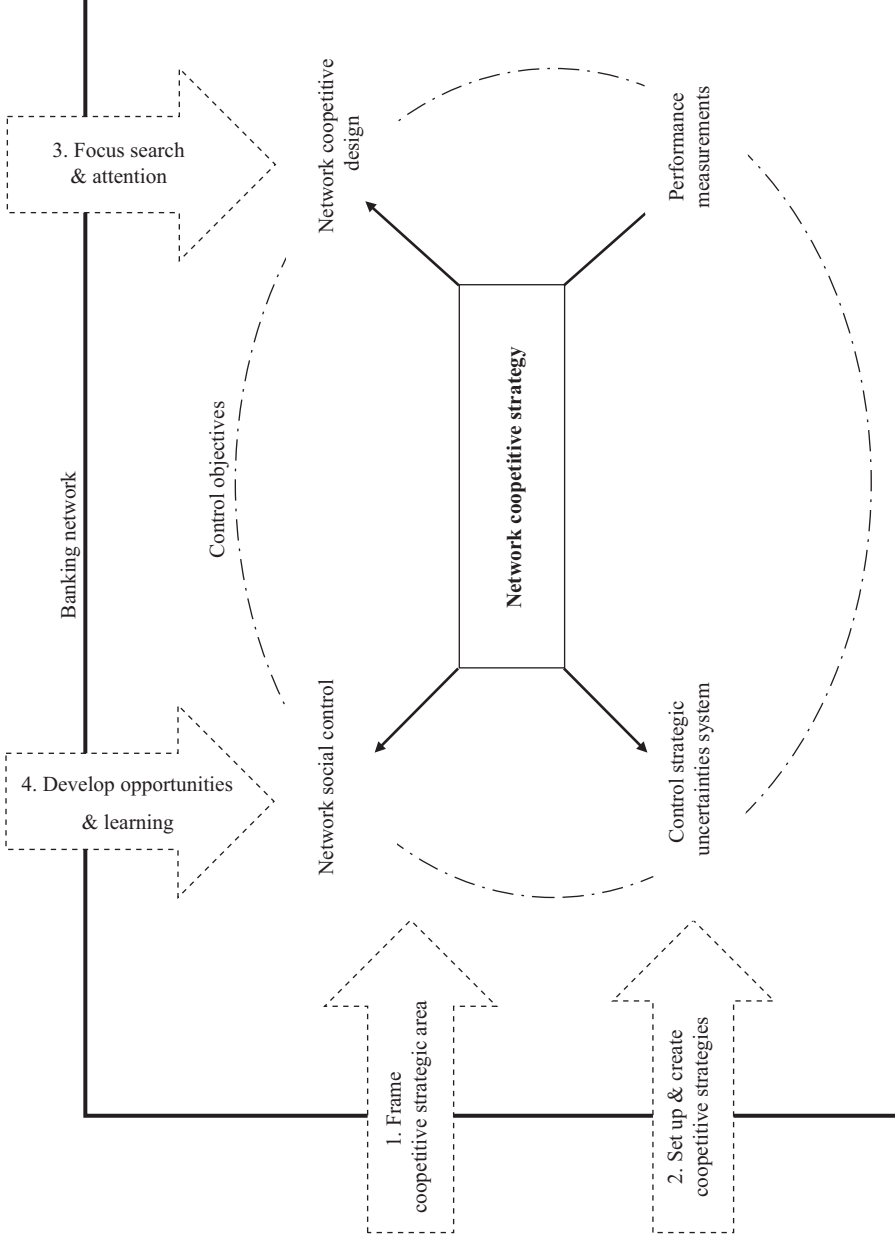


Figure 34.3 Integrative management control framework for a cooperative network

Second, network-level or industry-level empirical studies are still few. This level of analysis takes into account market structure contingencies, ecosystem competition, and collective growth strategies. Tensions arising under these conditions are stronger in a cooperative context because each individual defends his/her parent firm. While partner companies often agree on a collaborative strategy to be pursued jointly, they are also likely to pursue individual strategies that relate to their individual objectives. In particular, when a firm's private aspirations diverge from (or conflict with) the collaborative strategy, it results in competing tensions and greater complexity for alliance staff who are expected to act in the best interests of both parties. In fact, the role of the management control system is to balance the interests and decisions of boundary spanners with respect to the different objectives and strategies being pursued (Dekker, 2016). To investigate management control in the boundary organization through the boundary spanner, the boundary object concept may facilitate understanding how boundary spanner profiles and mechanisms must be mobilized for successful cooperation and why cooperation stabilizes over time.

Notes

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- 2 Banque Populaire Caisse d'Épargne.

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