

## Abstract 53

### PARADOXICAL SITUATIONS – THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEUR IN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL COOPETITION

Academic paper

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Abstract text:

Purpose

Innovation is the main indicator for competitive advantage for both startups and corporates (OECD, 2019). Especially radical innovation can be increased by applying the management tool of coopetition, the simultaneous occurrence of competition and cooperation between organizations (inter-firm, organizational), within organizations (intra-firm, organizational) or in a team (individual) (Bouncken et al., 2015). The importance of coopetition for both entrepreneurs and corporates is emphasized by the fact that more than 50 % of all cooperations are among competitors (Gnyawali & Park, 2011). However, the precise measures constituting the right tools to manage coopetition are not yet fully understood, given that up to 60 % of all coopetitive situations fail (McKinsey, 2019).

Research on coopetition on the individual level is especially scarce, with only 5 % of coopetition literature dealing with this level, despite its high potential for contributing to a more profound understanding of coopetition on both the individual and the organizational level (Chiambaretto et al., 2019; Bouncken et al., 2015). Following various research calls (e.g., Chiambaretto et al., 2019; Dorn et al., 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2009), we address coopetition on the individual level by analyzing the role of individuals' character traits and their environment as enablers/obstacles to coopetition.

Originality & Value

Earlier literature on coopetition and psychology stated that individuals unlikely create a coopetitive situation because paradoxical situations such as coopetition are imposed onto individuals rather than individuals being the cause of them. However, recent qualitative research assumes that paradoxical individual characteristics or tendencies, like narcissism, might have an effect on the emergence of a paradoxical situation after all (Lord & Hernandez, 2016). Their main argument is that being narcissistic is defined as paradoxical state in and by itself as both being self-centered and dependent on external mental support by peers (Braun, 2017).

In line with these findings, we compare paradoxical character tendencies like narcissism to non-paradoxical character traits (big five traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) by applying the paradox theory. Paradox theory states that individuals with a paradox mindset develop new approaches to establish and handle paradoxical situations such as coopetition (Waldman et al., 2019).

To increase chances to observe innovative startups collaborating and competing with e.g., industrial partners, we focus on academic entrepreneurs who we define as individuals who work in an academic environment and are either already involved in an academic spin-off or show a strong willingness towards doing so.

Design & Methodology

In order to analyze the role of the individual in a paradoxical situation like coopetition and the influence of the environment such as perceived social support, we collected data from 200 academic entrepreneurs in Germany. We distributed questionnaires at TU9 universities, a legitimate subgroup of the biggest technical universities in Germany, in the time between July and September 2020. For defining our sample data set, we followed studies by Grimpe & Fier (2010) and Siegel & Bozeman

(2007) to ensure that enough data is available to set up comparisons between various character traits.

We built our questionnaire based on established constructs to ensure validity. Following previous studies, we applied a construct established by Lin et al. (2010) that measures both competition and cooperation inside a team to the individual level as our dependent variable. As independent variables, we use the big five character traits by Gosling et al. (2003). We compare the character traits to the construct of narcissism by Collani (2014) that enables us to analyze the influence of a paradoxical character trait compared to individual non-paradoxical character traits measured. As moderator we apply the construct of perceived social support by Kliem et al. (2015) who transferred the original scale by Zimet et al. (1988) to the German cultural context. We test our hypotheses by using a multiple-regression modelling with Stata.

### Results & Findings

Based on our preliminary results we expect that narcissism has a positive effect on the emergence of ole in the emergence of cooperation on the individual-level. Furthermore, we expect that there will be significant differences between different character traits in how far they contribute to the emergence of a cooperative situation. A high perceived social support will have an influence on the balance (amplitude) of cooperation in the case that a character trait leads to cooperation in the first place.

### Limitations & Implications

Several limitations of this study need to be mentioned: First, we gathered our data in the context of universities. It is possible that studies about entrepreneurs in the non-academic environment show different results. Second, we only take the individual-level into consideration while there needs to be research conducted about transferring the results to the organizational-level.

With our research we want to contribute to theory and practice in several ways: First, we extend research conducted on the individual level of cooperation. Even though there is an increasing number of cooperative and paradoxical situations due to a higher demand for increasing the speed of innovation (Bengtsson and Kock, 2000).

Second, we shift cooperation to the entrepreneurial context by using a data set collected from entrepreneurs in the academic environment. This will provide new insights in how far entrepreneurs can influence and manage paradoxical situations successfully (Bouncken et al., 2015).

Further, we introduce the paradox theory in the research context of cooperation. So far, cooperation has been mainly analyzed based on three main theories, namely network theory, resource-based view and game theory. By drawing upon the topic of cooperation using the paradox theory, we can provide new insights by emphasizing the individual in a paradoxical situation (Gnyawali & Park, 2011).

From a practitioner's perspective, this study provides insights regarding how to deal with paradoxical situations that entrepreneurs increasingly have to face in today's complex work environment.

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