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THE PHENOMENON OF COOPETITION IN EUROPEAN PROJECT¹ MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Introduction

The pillars and basic assumptions of coopetitive or coopetition structures have been described in "game theory", a scientific field that received more attention with the famous book "Theory of Games and Economic Behavior" in 1944 and the works of John Forbes Nash on non-cooperative games. By deduction Nash findings have been applied in several situation, and in different fields (politics, sciences, economics, sociology, psychology, and business strategy, among others). In organizational theory several authors claim that "coopetition" happens when firms interact with partial congruence or partial compatibility of goals or rationales. They could share or cooperate partially with each other to reach a common goal or objective or the consortium or the cluster, and restart their battles and fights to achieve an advantage over the others using all the means or competitive advantages possible.

The interest in the phenomenon of co-existence of cooperation and competition between enterprises, that is known as "coopetition", was then noticed in 1993 by Noord Raymund, who managed Novell, an IT company based in the United States of America. He noted that, on the one hand, IT companies compete fiercely with each other and, on the other hand, in certain cases they are capable of uniting their efforts to collaborate towards a specific business goal. Only two years upon identifying

^{*} Blili Sam, Professor – Director of Institute of Entrepreneurship at the University in Neuchatel, Switzerland.

^{**} Grzegorz Krzos, Ph.D. – Institute of Organization and Management at the University of Economics in Wrocław.

¹ A European project – a shortened name for a project co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget often "incarnate" or structured by joint-ventures, and other types of alliances and consortiums.

the phenomenon of coopetition by Noord many scholars became interested in these issues, with the following persons among them: the duo Brandenburger A. – Nalebuff B. duo, Dagino G.B., Gnyawali D.R., Padula G., Walley K., Yami S., Le Roy F. In Poland, in turn, the major researchers of this phenomenon include: Czakon W., Cygler J., Wyrwicka M.K. and the Lozano A. – Sysko-Romańczuk S. duo. Due to the fact that coopetition is not accounted for in up-to-date dictionaries of foreign words, the dictionary of the Polish language or dictionaries of business terms, it should be considered a neologism which seems to have established itself in management terminology.

For the situation where competition and collaboration occur simultaneously, the researcher K.E. Walley proposed to distinguish three subtypes of coopetition:

- cooperation prevalence: where cooperation prevails over competition when two entities collaborate with each other,
- equal collaboration: in the case of such coopetition there is an equal amount of collaboration and competition within the existing relationship,
- competition prevalence: where competitive activities prevail over cooperative activities.

M. Bengston and S. Knock [2] proposed a different perception of the phenomenon of coopetition. When at least two enterprises compete and cooperate with each other in similar conditions and take decisions independently of other enterprises, reciprocal coopetition occurs. However, when cooperation and competition between two enterprises are determined by many actors playing in a network, it is called multipolar coopetition.

For Levy et al.: "Coopetition is the contractual agreement between competitive organizations to exist in a parallel cooperative and competitive environment. Contracts align organizations that perceive beneficial information and resource exchange" [12].

The issue of coopetition has still been a new and trendy topic in Poland, and the phenomenon of coopetition itself was presented and discussed during the academic conferences on management organised in the period 2008–2012 in Poland. The achievements of management sciences with respect to cooperation and competition is rich and precise enough to constitute a truly mature source of reference for the attempt to analyse the phenomenon of coopetition in European project management².

² In the Polish management literature an additional term "kooperencja" ["cooperence"] occurred. It is promoted by Joanna Cygler, the author of the book titled *Kooperencja przedsiębiorstw. Czynniki sektorowe i korporacyjne*, SGH, Warsaw 2009. It includes the definition of "kooperencja", which is considered by the writer as a type of relationships between competitors where cooperation and competition streams occur simultaneously. The cooperation stream may assume diverse forms of collaboration: from social agreements (gentlemen's agreements sealed with a handshake), to non-capital projects, to capital agreements. "Kooperencja" is discussed comprehensively: as streams (and not single agreements or projects).

The intention was to prove that the phenomenon of coopetition occurred in the examined project management teams, identify the causes of coopetition and determine the specificity of this phenomenon which accompanies European project management.

The present paper presents these results of the research that are related to the aspects of multi-entity and virtual management of European projects. One of the indirect goals of the research was an attempt to analyse the relationships between the entities present in project management teams. The results of the research confirmed the earlier assumptions and hypotheses that the phenomenon of coopetition occurs in such teams. The examined entities were beneficiaries of EU assistance, that is enterprises (35), public sector entities (35) and project management enterprises (42) from five Polish voivodeships. The total number of 115 European projects were examined. The research was conducted with the use of research techniques such as the analysis of application documentation and project documentation (115), interviews (including cati) with beneficiaries of EU assistance (44), interviews (including cati) with management staff of a project management team (42), participant observation (36) and analysis of tender documentation placed on the websites of beneficiaries of EU assistance (115). Both the pilot and the proper research were carried out in the period 2007–2012.

Coopetition in a "consortium" in European project management

Together with Loebeke et al. [13, p. 14], we could define coopetition as: "simultaneous co-operation and competition between firms. Coopetition entails the sharing of knowledge which may be a key source of competitive advantage. Under coopetition there is a paradox that the knowledge shared for cooperation may also be used for competition. While the existence of this problem is known, there is little investigation of how it may be modelled and, thus, managed." Loebeke and Al introduce a game-theoretic framework for analysing inter-organizational knowledge sharing in the context of coopetition. For the authors: "This allows the value of knowledge shared to be investigated and reveals that a crucial aspect will be the firm's ability to manage the process".

More recently, Wong and Al study on Cross-Functional Team Organizational Citizenship Behavior in China proposes that a shared organizational vision develops cooperative interdependence among departments which, in turn, facilitates cross-functional teams' organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). "Team members indicated their organizations' shared vision, and leaders indicated the goal interdependence among departments and the OCB of the teams. Their analysis and

results suggested combining independent and competitive goals, and this combined measure negatively predicted team OCB. These results suggest that a shared organizational vision and cooperative goals among departments are important foundations for cross-functional teams to contribute to the performance of organizations through socially responsible behaviour" [19, pp. 1879–2909].

The results of the conducted research proved that the dominant form of European project management was a "virtual organisation" (consortium)³, that is one consisting of at least two equity-unrelated economic entities establishing a project alliance in the form of a consortium for the term of the project. The external solution (67), that is management by an external entity or external entities, was most commonly applied in EU project management. This solution resulted from the decision to outsource the project management service. The internal solution (34), that is one fully based on internal resources of the beneficiary, was ranked next. 14 cases of the examined population, in turn, were mixed solutions, that is ones based both on employees of a beneficiary of EU assistance and entities and individuals not being beneficiaries of EU assistance or their employees. It turned out that in the examined projects the phenomenon of coopetition occurred in 70.4% of the cases of project management and in all (100%) cases of the external and mixed project management method. The results disclosed that at least one of the enterprises belonging to a given consortium had earlier competed in tendering procedures with enterprises from other consortia. The owners and managers of the enterprises collaborated with each other by negotiating and establishing project consortia in order to win a given contract. The consortia and teams created in this manner collaborated when managing the project within the developed agreements and signed civil agreements. This case of coopetition seems to be a result of a market game played on two planes of collaboration and competition of entities in the virtual organisation established for the purpose of managing the examined European projects [9, pp. 215–226].

The observations and analysis of the phenomenon of coopetition and one of its components, that is cooperation, unambiguously prove that what occurs in European projects management is a type of external cooperation that displays the features of positive collaboration [16, p. 47]. The dominant role of specialisation and vertical integration in creating a project management team was a characteristic of such collaboration. The vast majority of the examined teams (70.3% of the cases) formed management teams in such a way that all objectives to be executed in a given contract were divided among the members of the management teams in accordance

³ Blili Sam – when we talk about virtual organisations, I think we should refer in this case to consortiums or alliances, or partnership networks. However virtual organisation in my understanding are in general. com firms, like google, ebay, etc. We call them also hollow firms.

with their competences. Therefore, the basis for the division of works was grouping them by specialisations of the objectives and performed activities [15, p. 71]. The cases of the management teams where having formal references crucial for winning the contract were the dominant in the process of negotiating the division of the objectives among partners are an exception to the analysis. In 19.7% of the cases the entity having the crucial references pursued virtually no objectives from the contract except providing the virtual organisation (consortium) with formal references necessary to win the contract.

2. Characteristics of coopetition and accompanying phenomena in European project management

As mentioned above, it was noticed during the conducted research that project management is accompanied by new phenomena that are inter- and intraorganisational in nature. One of them is the phenomenon of coopetition, whose specificity consists, among others, in:

- diverse nature and diverse intensity of coopetition in the individual life phases of a virtual organisation in European project management,
- occurrence of competitive, cooperative and balanced coopetition,
- occurrence of reciprocal and virtual coopetition,
- occurrence of informal coopetition based on informal agreements called by project managers "gentlemen's agreements",
- occurrence of project treason.

The analysis of the occurrence of coopetition and its intensity in project management as well as the analysis of the results of the research on life phases of a virtual organisation in project management published by the author permits to notice that various intensity levels of the phenomenon of coopetition occur in the project management practice (Tab.1., Fig. 1. and Fig. 2.) [10, pp. 166–170]. The type and level of coopetition arise from competitive and cooperative behaviours [3] of the partners which create an interorganisational project management team in the form of a virtual organisation (Fig.1.). The resultant of these behaviours, in turn, is coopetitive behaviours and, consequently, the phenomenon of coopetition. The results of the research carried out on 36 projects by means of the participant observation method indicate that the phenomenon of coopetition changes its intensity and nature during the performance of the European project management service.

In order to determine and illustrate competitive behaviours (Tab. 1.) between partners in a project management team, characteristic actions on the competition plane were identified and counted. The greater the number of the items listed below in a given phase, the higher the intensity of competitive behaviours and vice versa.

During the research the following competitive behaviours were identified in an interorganisational project management team creating a virtual organisation:

- a) negotiating in the "win-lose" instead of "win-win" style,
- b) no or low trust for employees from other companies,
- c) no or low trust for the owners and the management staff of collaborating companies,
- d) limited loyalty to partners,
- e) undermining the credibility of partners (persons and companies),
- f) questioning the competences of partners (persons and companies),
- g) lying and concealing significant information,
- h) seeking new customers independently, without collaboration with partners,
- reducing diffusion and popularisation of specialised knowledge among persons and companies in the team,
- j) no or low sense of responsibility for the project as a whole,
- k) being disloyal to partners in favour of other persons and/or companies.

In order to determine and illustrate cooperative behaviours (Tab. 1.) between partners in a project management team, in turn, characteristic actions on the cooperation plane were identified and counted. The greater the number of the items listed below in a given phase, the higher the intensity of competitive behaviours and vice versa. The following cooperative behaviours were identified in an interorganisational project management team:

- a) co-decision-making,
- b) intensive information exchange,
- c) experience exchange,
- d) developing crucial competences jointly,
- e) resolving problems in the project jointly,
- f) supervising the project jointly,
- g) negotiating with partners in the "win-win" style,
- h) trust for the owners and management staff of cooperating companies,
- i) loyalty to partners,
- j) common strategy for attracting customers,
- k) sense of collective responsibility for the entire project, and not its components.

The results of the research on competitive and cooperative behaviours which indicate what number of both types of behaviours occurred in the individual life phases of a virtual organisation established for the purpose of European project management are presented in Tab. 1. The quantity prevalence of the items enumerated above from one set over the items from the other set indicates the dominance of competitive or cooperative behaviours in a given phase.

Table 1. Analysis of the intensity of cooperative, competitive and coopetitive behaviours in the individual life phases of a virtual organisation established for the purpose of European project management

Phases	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV	Phase V	Phase VI	Phase VII
Intensity of cooperative behaviours	0	a, g, i, j (4)	a, g, h, j, i (5)	a, b, h, i (4)	a, d, c, h, i, k (6)	a, b, c, d, e, f, h, i, j, k (10)	a, b, e, f, g, h, i, j, k (9)
Intensity of competitive behaviours	h (1)	a, c, d, g, h, k (6)	a, c, d, g, h, k (6)	b, c, i, j (4)	b, c, i, j (4)	b, e, f, i, j (5)	b, c, d, e, f, g, h, j, k (9)
Intensity of coopetitive behaviours	1	10	11	8	10	15	18

Source: own work based on the participant observation in European projects (n=36).

The presented results of the observation of competitive and cooperative behaviours could be reduced to basic mathematical operations. Thus, four aggregated relationships confirmed in the practice of the carried out research are presented below.

- 1. Intensity of coopetitive behaviours = intensity of competitive behaviours + intensity of cooperative behaviours.
- 2. If intensity of competitive behaviours > intensity of cooperative behaviours, then competitive behaviours between partners prevail. Competitive coopetition occurs then (phases I, II, III).
- 3. If intensity of competitive behaviours < intensity of cooperative behaviours, then cooperative behaviours between partners prevail. Cooperative coopetition occurs then (phases V, VI).
- 4. If intensity of competitive behaviours = intensity of cooperative behaviours, then the state of equilibrium and hence, balanced coopetition occurs (phases IV, VII).

The first relationship is exemplified graphically in Fig. 1., where the highest intensity of coopetitive behaviours is shown to have been reached in phases VI–VII, the medium level occurred in phases II, III and V, whereas the lowest intensity level was noted in phases I and IV.

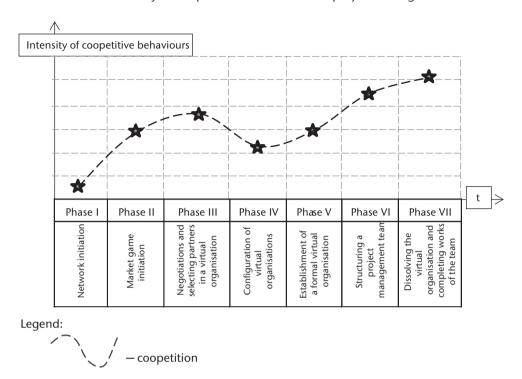


Figure 1. Life phases of a virtual organisation in European project management versus intensity of coopetitive behaviours in a project management team

Source: own work based on the participant observation in European projects (n=36).

When analysing these results, one may draw some conclusions and make certain observations. The phenomenon of coopetition did not occur between enterprises in phase I. This situation is visible in Fig. 1. and Fig. 2. Lack of coopetition between enterprises in this phase resulted from lack of collaboration between them. These enterprises were exclusively actual or prospective competitors to each other.

The informal birth and further development of coopetition occur in phases II, III and IV of virtual organisation development in European project management. These are the phases where the market game for the customer begins, followed by negotiations and selecting partners for prospective collaboration and configuration of resources for a future project. In phases II and III competitive behaviours prevail over cooperative ones due to the fact that each of the network participants believes that they are able to win a project management contract independently or take the dominant position in the future project management consortium. Such behaviours of the persons representing economic entities are characteristic for the enterprises which traditionally provide project management services independently or constitute a component of the market game aimed at gaining a position that is as beneficial as

possible in negotiations accompanying the establishment of e.g. a consortium. In this phase the attempts to establish cooperation between partners most frequently ended in a failure in comparison to other life phases of a virtual organisation in European project management.

In phase IV, intensity of coopetitive behaviours was low and intensity of cooperation was equal to competition. In this phase a partner for cooperation was sought to jointly compete with other groups or consortia for a prospective contract. The actions taken by the entities interested in creating a team when seeking a partner for collaboration, conducting negotiations and selecting partners were characterised by caution and attempts to build trust between partners and by assessment of their credibility. The major goal in this phase was to establish cooperation with partners, and hence the balance between cooperative and competitive behaviours.

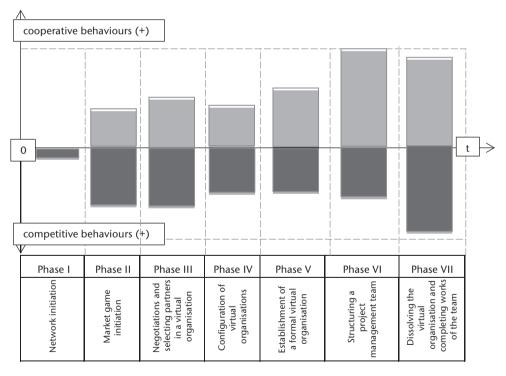
The phenomenon of coopetition is formally born as late as in phase V, that is upon signing a civil agreement, e.g. consortium and a project management services agreement. Signing the documents formally is a commencement of a more structuralised, organised and repetitive collaboration, as a result of which a high number of documents regarding the project is prepared. In this phase cooperative behaviours prevail because competing with each other once the contract has been signed would not be evaluated positively by partners.

Phase VI of the life of a virtual organisation, called the phase of structuring a European project management team, constitutes the coopetition development phase. In this phase activities related to the creation of a team and pursuit of operational objectives arising from the agreements concluded with customers and participants of a virtual organisation occur. In phase VI cooperative behaviours strongly prevail over competitive behaviours, to the extent that partners focus on collaboration to perform the contract as effectively as possible. This behaviour results also from the cyclicity of the executed obligations and from the unwillingness to disturb the rhythm of the entire team's work by any of the partners, which could increase the level of the risk e.g. related to qualified delay and, as a consequence, charging penalties for culpable delay.

In the last, VII, phase, coopetition is intensive and balanced in nature since competitive behaviours are balanced with cooperative ones. The high level of competitive behaviours resulted from the fact of approaching the end of the collaboration between partners and the necessity to seek new customers (commissions), for whom a similar service could be provided, not necessarily by the same team. The actions consisting in seeking new customers and contracts independently, without the collaboration with the current partners, were perceived as competitive behaviours in a consortium. They are characterised by, among others, seeking a contract independently, not informing the current partners of a prospective new customer – contract, refusing collaboration on another project with other partners, proposing a lower price

to the new customer comparative to the current price for a similar scope of project management services, etc. A high level of cooperative behaviour arises from intensive actions performed by the whole team to complete the project correctly and as effectively as possible. These actions result from the provisions included in the agreement with the customer and the project leader, and their correct observance involves the possibility to issue a VAT invoice and reception of payments. At the end of phase VII and upon its completion the entities participating in a virtual organisation need to choose one of three options: competing, collaborating or coopeting with each other in the next project. Fig. 2. presents a visualisation of various levels of intensity of both cooperative and competitive behaviours in the individual life phases of a virtual organisation established for the purpose of European project management. Such a graphical representation of both phenomena permits the determination of not only the prevalence type but also the intensity level of individual behaviours.

Figure 2. Life phases of a virtual organisation in European project management versus intensity of competitive and cooperative behaviours in a project management team



Legend:

- cooperating (collaborating)

- competing

Source: own work based on the participant observation in European projects (n=36).

Coopetition as an interorganisational phenomenon has its own life stages from the moment of its birth until its decline. The six-stage model of successive life stages of coopetition presented in Fig. 3. ought to be characterised by the moment when coopetition is non-existent in this period, when there is no collaboration between entities, and there is only competition (stage I). Initiating cooperation between competitors on any project is deemed an informal birth of coopetition. It is informal because coopetition does not usually create any documents but is based on telephone conversations, personal talks, meetings with prospective business partners, exchange of e-mails (stage II). In the following stage, III, partners sign formal documents in the form of economic agreements and other documents accompanying the contract. Stage III is considered a formal birth of coopetition. At stage IV partners begin structuring the cooperation with each other in compliance with the provisions of the concluded agreements and experience. The main point is to appoint a management team and fill posts in the team, execute objectives by each of the partners and take supervision and control actions by the management staff of the companies being a part of the project management team. At stage V maturity of coopetitive behaviours occurs since this is the stage where the project is completed. The closer the end of the project management service provision schedule is, the more frequently partners try to find a new customer and commission independently, at the same time intensifying competitive behaviours equally to cooperative behaviours which are intensive due to the range of the works related to the final part of the contract performance. At stage VI coopetition declines as a consequence of completing the works arising from the contract. It is worth emphasising here that the decline of coopetition means the end of coopetition only in a given project and contract, whereas at the same time this can constitute its birth in another project. What can be concluded from the project management practice is that in the case of the entities oriented towards working in a network and virtual organisations coopetition will occur in multiple cases simultaneously.

The analysis of the phenomenon of coopetition in project management allowed also the identification of life stages of coopetition, which are presented in Fig. 3.

Figure 3. Life stages of coopetition in European project management

Life cycle of coopetition in European project management								
"Lack of collaboration between partners"	"Initiating collaboration between competitors – informal birth of coopetition"	"Formal birth of coopetition"	"Structuring coopetition"	"Maturity of coopetition"	"Decline of coopetition"			
Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage IV	Stage V	Stage VI			

Source: own work based on [11, pp. 191-202].

Conclusion

As has been already mentioned, during the conducted research it was noticed that project management is accompanied by new phenomena that are inter- and intraorganisational in nature.

One of them if the phenomenon of coopetition, the specificity of which includes among others:

- diverse nature and diverse intensity of coopetition in the individual life phases of a virtual organisation in EU project management,
- occurrence of competitive, cooperative and balanced coopetition,
- occurrence of reciprocal and virtual coopetition,
- occurrence of informal coopetition based on informal agreements.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasising that the situation of high demand for and low supply of project management services facilitates the phenomenon of coopetition. The reverse situation, that is high competition and low demand for project management services, also facilitates the phenomenon of coopetition. Hence, it can be concluded that market equilibrium and similar states do not facilitate coopetition in European project management. Most probably, a balanced market "distributes" work and commissions equally, without encouraging managers to establish project alliances and consortia.

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THE PHENOMENON OF COOPETITION IN EUROPEAN PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Abstract

The paper presents the results of the research carried out in Polish enterprises and public institutions. The aim of the presented paper is to validate that the phenomenon of coopetition could occur in the examined European project management teams and determine the specificity of this phenomenon which accompanies European project management. The findings of the research do confirm the presence of coopetition in interorganisational European project management teams.

KEY WORDS: EUROPEAN PROJECT MANAGEMENT, COOPETITION, COOPERATION, COMPETITION, VIRTUAL ORGANIZATION, CONSORTIUM

ZJAWISKO KOOPETYCJI W ZARZĄDZANIU PROJEKTAMI EUROPEJSKIMI

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest charakterystyka i identyfikacja zjawiska koopetycji w procesie zarządzania projektem europejskim. Koopetycja występuje w różnych fazach rozwoju organizacji wirtualnej utworzonej na potrzeby zarządzania projektem. Koopetycja posiada również charakter wielofazowy. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań wskazujące na występowanie koopetycji w projektach europejskich.

KLUCZOWE SŁOWA: ZARZĄDZANIE PROJEKTEM EUROPEJSKIM, KOOPETYCJA, KOOPERACJA, KONKURENCJA, ORGANIZACJA WIRTUALNA, KONSORCJUM