



Coopetitive dynamics, really? Towards an interaction perspective on coopetition

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has traditionally understood the dynamic nature of coopetition as shifts between relational states of coopetition over time and has treated coopetition interplay and coopetitive dynamics tautologically. This understanding is problematic because it fails to capture the continuous flux of changes in coopetitive relationships based on the finer details of partners' situated interactions on the micro-level. To overcome this limitation, this conceptual paper introduces the interaction perspective on coopetition, which allows us to uncover the microfoundations of the cooperation-competition interplay that bring about shifts in coopetitive relationships. By focusing researchers' attention on managers' reflecting-in-action, coopetition work that propels temporal interactions, and the relational embeddedness of their interactions, the interaction perspective helps us better understand the dynamic nature of coopetition and uncover the coopetitive dynamics feeding into the coopetition interplay and triggering moves towards new relational states. This paper makes four key contributions to the coopetition literature, outlines methodological implications of the suggested interaction perspective, and identifies avenues for further research.

1. Introduction

Coopetition—the simultaneous pursuit of cooperation and competition among firms to leverage strategically-important resources for superior value creation purposes (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Fernandez et al., 2018; Gnyawali et al., 2006; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018)—has attracted considerable attention among scholars of strategy and organization expanding our understanding of coopetition in multiple ways (for reviews see Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn et al., 2016; Gernsheimer et al., 2021). Overall, researchers agree that firms can benefit from the unique advantages of coopetition and avoid its negative outcomes only if this special relationship is properly managed. What makes coopetition so managerially challenging is the simultaneity and interrelatedness of two contradicting logics of interaction—cooperation and competition—and the balancing of these competing aims has been metaphorically described by researchers as “walking a tightrope” (Park et al., 2014, p. 210; Rai,

Gnyawali, & Bhatt, 2023, p. 2354). In brief, it is difficult for managers to balance cooperation and competition without favoring one over the other.

The approach that coopetition scholars usually take is treating cooperation and competition as relational states within an interorganizational relationship (i.e., cooperation-dominant, competition-dominant, and weakly or strongly balanced relationships). A central argument is that gaining the most from a coopetitive relationship requires that cooperation and competition be in balance and pursued simultaneously (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in press; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018). While this “balanced” approach is intellectually appealing and conceptually tidy, the inherent tensions in coopetitive relationships—stemming from the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition—mean that managers find it difficult to walk the tightrope. The managing of such tensions may alter the coopetitive relationship and move it from one state of coopetition to another.

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Based on the above logic, the dynamic nature of coopetition has been conceptualized as moves between different relational states where cooperation and competition vary in intensity. Yet, this means that the *coopetition interplay* that occurs on the interorganizational level (i.e., the ways in which cooperation and competition relate to each other and have an effect on each other over time) and *coopetitive dynamics* that unfold on the interaction level have been treated tautologically. We define coopetitive dynamics as the flow of partners' situated actions, reactions, and spontaneous readjustments made over time in response to events and surprises they encounter in their interactions with partners and argue that prior research has overlooked those dynamics as they were conflated with coopetition interplay.

What we call the *relationship perspective on coopetition* has mainly focused on issues related to the simultaneity of cooperation and competition, exploring the inherent tensions of coopetition and identifying the cognitive capabilities needed to deal with these tensions (Bengtsson et al., 2016). This perspective highlights key forces enabling or impeding changes in the intensities of cooperation and competition on the interorganizational level (Bengtsson et al., 2010) and focuses on mechanisms that explain whether coopetition will entail positive or negative outcomes (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). Research has also started to discuss the interplay between the two main elements of coopetition in terms of how they augment and constrain each other's positive and negative consequences (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in press). This line of recent studies has prompted research into the underlying aspects of cooperation-competition interplay, but deeper insights into the microfoundations of the cooperation-competition interplay are needed.

Although the relationship perspective has helped us understand the nature of coopetition as a dynamic phenomenon by focusing on the coopetition interplay and showing how competition and cooperation co-exist, interact, and influence each other (Fernandez et al., 2018), it has three inherent limitations. Those limitations prevent us from identifying the micro-level coopetitive dynamics that propel the interplay between cooperation and competition on the interorganizational level. The first limitation is its emphasis on cognitivist explanations. These explanations foreground rationality and thought processes, yet they overlook managers' situated practices. Second, this perspective emphasizes aggregate relational states and balance, overlooking the temporal interactions and coopetition work that result from surprises, and partners' reflective practices and interventions in the midst of their actions. Third, the relationship perspective fails to account for the broader relational context that directly or indirectly influences managers' practices and partners' interactions.

With these limitations in mind, we develop a complementary perspective on coopetition that offers a more-processual understanding of coopetitive relationships. Our *interaction perspective* acknowledges the recent work of researchers who recognize coopetition as an emergent phenomenon where temporality and interactions entwine (Dahl, 2014; Efrat et al., 2022; Monticelli et al., 2023; Pattinson et al., 2018) and it responds to criticism that current coopetition theorizing lacks clarity, parsimony, and methodological rigor (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). The interaction perspective also responds to calls for a more "thorough examination of the dynamic pattern of the cooperative arrangement over time" (Majchrzak et al., 2015, p. 1357). By moving beyond chronological "clock" time conceptions, we highlight the value of seeing that past, present, and future events are constantly co-defined and re-configured (Hussenot et al., 2020; Reinecke et al., 2021). Based on this logic, the interaction perspective on coopetition defines temporality as "constructed and negotiated organizing of time" (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016, p. 1009) and encourages researchers to see that coopetition is both a situated and an unfolding process.

The interaction perspective focuses researchers' attention on coopetitive dynamics which result from the partners' interactions on the micro level and their entailed fluctuating emphases on cooperative or competitive efforts at different points in time. This perspective moves

coopetition research down to the interaction level—to partners' situated actions and interactions—and allows researchers to systematically analyze the flow of partners' activities over time. It broadens our understanding of coopetitive dynamics and allows us to see these dynamics as more than just shifts between relational states. By explicitly accounting for issues of temporality, the engaged parties' situated practices, and the role of the relational context in which partners are embedded, the interaction perspective complements the dominant relationship perspective. We provide four key contributions to coopetition research: (i) help reconcile the coopetition interplay and coopetitive dynamics debate; (ii) reconceptualize the notion of balance in evolving coopetitive relationships; (iii) highlight the role of coopetition work in temporal interactions; and (iv) establish why the relational context of coopetitive relationships is so important and how researchers can study it.

Next, we discuss the relationship perspective and three of its important contributions as well as its limitations. While this perspective has generated important insights, it has also diverted attention away from the intricate workings of the coopetition interplay and managers' temporally and relationally embedded interactions. We then develop the interaction perspective on coopetition and articulate how it can improve our understanding and theorizing of the dynamic nature of coopetition.

2. The relationship perspective on coopetition: contributions and limitations

2.1. Three important contributions

The relationship perspective on coopetition has grown from Bengtsson and Kock (2000) seminal work that has shaped our understanding of coopetition. This perspective has made three important contributions. The first is its break with the long-held assumption that cooperation and competition are two separate, opposing, and conflicting phenomena that—when combined—lead to value destruction (e.g., Park & Ungson, 2001). Coopetition scholars have shown the opposite: that cooperation and competition coexist at the relationship level, and that the simultaneous presence of both can result not only in negative but also in positive outcomes (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). These benefits include risk and cost sharing, technological breakthroughs, business-model innovation (Ritala & Sainio, 2014), and access to relevant and critical resources and capabilities needed to achieve strategic objectives (Gnyawali & Park, 2011). To realize the positive outcomes of coopetition and minimize the risks, however, firms need to actively manage their pursuit of shared objectives as well as partners' individual agendas (Chen, 2008; Le Roy & Fernandez, 2015).

Studies adopting the relationship perspective emphasize a fundamental challenge of coopetition, namely the tension between simultaneous and contradictory demands. Those include tensions between knowledge sharing versus knowledge protection, trust versus distrust, openness versus closeness, value creation versus value appropriation. The relationship perspective has identified the negative consequences of partners' failing to effectively manage tensions, such as knowledge leakage, partner opportunism, misappropriation of resources, high dependencies and lock-ins, hampering of individual differentiation, and even misuse of the knowledge acquired from joint activities (Bouncken et al., 2015; Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Fernandez et al., 2014; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Park & Russo, 1996; Park & Ungson, 2001; Raza-Ullah & Kostis, 2020; Rouyre & Fernandez, 2019).

The second, groundbreaking contribution of the relationship perspective is its adoption of a paradox lens, which has shown us how firms and partners can deal with paradoxical tension (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; Rai et al., 2023; Raza-Ullah, 2020), defined as "the cognitive difficulty experienced by managers when they pursue multiple and simultaneously contradictory demands that are inherent in coopetition" (Raza-Ullah, 2020, p. 4). To manage the challenging situations of coopetition,

managers need a paradoxical mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) to effectively handle competing demands (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2020; Gnyawali et al., 2016; Rai et al., 2022; Raza-Ullah, 2020). Managing the inherent contradictions and tensions of cooptation has thus primarily been seen as a cognitive activity (Bengtsson et al., 2020; Gnyawali et al., 2016).

Researchers have argued, for instance, that these contradictions and tensions require managers to have a cooptation capability, defined as “the ability to think paradoxically and to initiate processes that help firms attain and maintain a moderate level of tension, irrespective of the strength of the paradox” (Bengtsson et al., 2016, p. 22). Bengtsson et al. (2020) found that firms with this capability better understand the paradox of cooptation, are able to craft relevant strategies, and make timely and accurate decisions, and thus they are better able to balance the contradictory demands of cooptation. Focusing on cognitive processes, Rai et al. (2023) also argued that cooptation capability involves three main aspects: a cooptation mindset (i.e., the ability to “recognize and accept cognitively the paradoxical nature of cooptation”), analytical acumen (i.e., the ability to “perform an in-depth examination of the paradoxical situations,” explore potential paths, and develop strategies to manage existing tensions), and execution skills (i.e., the ability to “make relevant strategic choices and implement them”). Overall, this literature has helped us understand how cooptitors can be maintain and manage seemingly incompatible goals.

The third contribution of the relationship perspective is identifying the different relational states of cooptation at the aggregate (macro) level. Depending on the intensities of cooperation and competition (i.e., high or low), these states include cooperation-dominant, competition-dominant, and balanced-weak and balanced-strong cooptation (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in-press; Luo, 2007, Luo et al., 2008). Researchers often map states of cooptation by using a two-continua conceptualization estimating the intensities of cooperation and competition respectively (see Fig. 1) and argue that different states lead to different cooptation outcomes (Bengtsson et al., 2010). The most dominant concept in the relationship perspective is the balance argument, which claims that cooptation is highly beneficial when the intensities of cooperation and competition are equal and neither too high nor too low: “Where intensities of competition and cooperation are moderate, the implications of each constituent element are sufficiently strong to derive potential benefits but also not so strong that they suppress the implications of the other element” (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018, p. 2521). Other researchers have taken this argument further, claiming that destructive dynamics emerge when cooperation and competition are unbalanced. They show that different forces (such as distancing, over-embedding, colluding, and confronting) can shift the relationship from one state to another (Bengtsson et al., 2010). In other words, research has argued that to benefit from cooptation and prevent negative consequences, firms need to balance cooperation and competition (Lado et al., 1997) and avoid competition- or cooperation-dominated relationships (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in press; Gnyawali

& Ryan Charleton, 2018). The dynamic nature of cooptation has thus been explained as moves between different relational states of cooptation (illustrated by the arrows in Fig. 1).

Recent research on cooptation has, however, acknowledged the importance of a dynamic interplay of cooperation and competition and started moving beyond a conception of dynamism as moves between different states of cooptation (e.g., Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in press), calling on researchers to study how inter-firm cooperative actions affect competitive actions and vice versa. This interplay between cooperation and competition can lead to both/and or either/or dynamics, according to Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (in press), with positive and negative outcomes, respectively. Both/and dynamics are virtuous and create value by augmenting positives and constraining negatives, while either/or dynamics destroy value by augmenting the negatives and constraining the positives. Yet, the primary focus in this recent research is primarily on how the dynamic interplay is related to outcomes or to internal processes within one organization, without zooming in on the action-reaction pattern in the interaction between firms. Moreover, a growing stream of research discusses emerging cooptation and calls for considering microfoundational elements, temporality, and interactions that not only occur over time but also influence and are influenced by a history of partners’ interactions and future expectations (Dahl, 2014; Efrat et al., 2022; Monticelli et al., 2023; Pattinson et al., 2018). While both lines of research are promising new directions for better understanding the dynamic nature of cooptation, further research is still needed.

In sum, the relationship perspective has been instrumental for our understanding of how cooperation and competition coexist and are interrelated as well as of how their interplay is a tension-filled, double-edged sword that requires necessary capabilities to balance the relationship and cope with its paradoxical nature. Despite these insights, the relationship perspective does not help us understand the micro-processes and mechanisms that explain how and why cooptative dynamics evolve as partners interact over time.

2.2. Three distinctive limitations

The relationship perspective has also its limitations, overlooking micro-level cooptative dynamics. Those limitations result from three distinct emphases: (i) an emphasis on merely cognitivist explanations, (ii) an emphasis on aggregate relational states and balance rather than on temporality and dynamics, and (iii) an emphasis on dis-embedded cooperation and competition.

A *first limitation* is that the relationship perspective views managers as “cognitive operators” (Klimas et al., 2022, p. 259) who need “cognitive frames and cognitive processes to understand and handle the paradox” (Gnyawali et al., 2016, p. 13) and to maintain sufficient degrees of cooperation and competition in cooptative relationships. While such cognitivist explanations of cooptation may indeed shed light on how managers perceive information and accept the duality of cooperation and competition, these explanations foreground intentionality and mental thought processes and therefore fail to account for managers’ involvement in the actual practices that bring about cooptation—practices that they usually enact without thinking and without converting experiences into mental maps.

This underlying cognitivist bias in the relationship perspective is one that appears more generally in the management and organization field. Yanow and Tsoukas (2009), for example, have criticized research that is bounded by a cognitivist orientation assuming that “actors come to know the world through thinking about it, converting experiences into mental maps of an outside world” (p. 1343). The same criticism applies to the relationship perspective on cooptation, since it pays insufficient attention to managers’ practice activities that involve the embeddedness of cognitive capabilities and mindsets in flows of both cooperative and competitive actions. The relationship perspective thus has a hard time

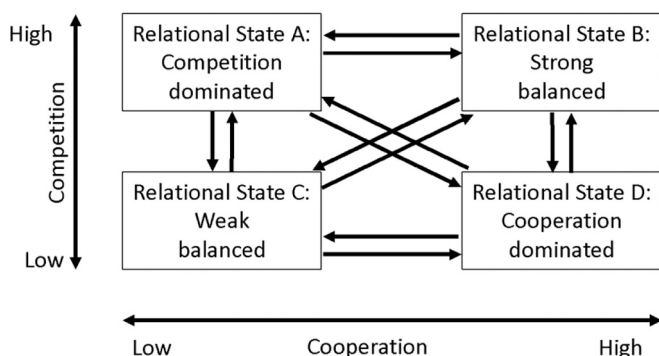


Fig. 1. Cooptative dynamics as moves between relational states.

explaining how coopetition morphs over time as a result of managers' actions and interactions, which involve surprises and responses to surprises that shape how relationships unfold. It is precisely this flow of actions and responses that researchers need to explore to more deeply understand cooperative dynamics and to move beyond the limited focus on the cognitive capabilities and mindsets necessary for maintaining “moderately strong” tensions.

A *second limitation* of the relationship perspective results from its emphasis on aggregate relational states and its conceptualization of time. The relationship perspective places emphasis on balance rather than on temporality and the situated practice of coopetition, in spite of many calls for researchers to decipher these aspects of cooperative dynamics. While research has suggested different types of coopetition based on intensities of cooperation and competition (Akpınar & Vincze, 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2010), limited efforts have been put towards unpacking the underlying mechanisms explaining why there are moves from one relational state to another over time, blocking a view of coopetition as an essentially highly interactive process. While moving between states with different degrees of intensity indicates that coopetition is a process, variance-based theorizing and the search for contingency explanations overlook the temporal flow of social practice (Langley et al., 2013; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) in the cooperative interaction.

Even when researchers do incorporate time in their theorizing on how coopetition morphs, they primarily discuss it in terms of the “simultaneity of cooperation and competition that persists over time” (Rai et al., 2023, p. 12), or in terms of maintaining sufficient intensity of both elements of coopetition over time (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). Time has mainly been treated chronologically, as phases and clock time in driver-process-outcomes models (e.g., Bengtsson et al., 2016). This, however, relegates the temporal flow of change to the background and pays limited attention to how the shadows of the past and shadows of the future intermesh with changes occurring in the midst of partners' situated actions (cf., Kostis et al., 2022).

Discrete temporal events, surprises, and unexpected incidents within a relationship in the present have a history and expected future effects that change how partners interact, and thus alter the coopetition interplay on the interorganizational level. Failing to account for these temporal events prevents scholars from seeing that interactions continuously shape and remake a relationship, one that is always in a state of “becoming.” The emphasis on relational states and balance in the relationship perspective (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) leads to research that focuses on how a relationship persists over time rather than on the flows of actions, interactions, and readjustments occurring at the interaction level between the competing firms. By adopting this conception of time, however, an understanding of the complexity and generative nature of the situated practices in partners' evergoing interactions are masked and a granular analysis of cooperative dynamics is impeded. In addition, details, incidents, events, and surprises that are instrumental and trigger changes in cooperative interactions can be overlooked, which leaves us with a less granular understanding of the mechanisms at play.

The focus on aggregate relational states and the chronological conception of time in the relationship perspective also inhibit explanations of partners' activities in the midst of actions and experiences; specifically, those “iterations of initiation, action, evaluation, and readjustments, to recalibrate initial conditions for the partnership” (Berends & Sydow, 2019, p. 2) that are involved in developing a cooperative relationship. Scholars have repeatedly called for research to focus on complex relational change processes (i.e., the coopetition process) (Gnyawali et al., 2016; Raza-Ullah et al., 2014), and a small but growing body of research has viewed coopetition as emergent, studying how time impacts interactions and balancing acts—and calling into question the importance of balance itself (Dahl, 2014; Efrat et al., 2022; Pattinson et al., 2018). But the analysis in this research has still

remained on the aggregated interorganizational level, overlooking managers' situated actions and interactions.

A *third limitation* of the relationship perspective is that it often does not account for the context in which the partners are embedded and within which their interactions take place. Intentionally or not, research in this perspective has treated partners' interactions and reflective practices as occurring in a vacuum. Treating cooperation and competition as phenomena that are dis-embedded from their relational context overlooks that the context both shapes and is shaped by each firm's actions. The business environments in which cooperative relationships are embedded are uncertain and are subject to exogenous shocks, surprises and unexpected incidents, even a partner's unexpected collaborations with others—all of which can affect competitors' actions and interactions. Yet, research has to a large extent neglected how managers improvise actions in the wake of contextual surprises and unexpected incidents, and has overlooked that a cooperative relationship can be influenced not only directly but also indirectly by others' actions in the relational context. For example, new collaborations of a partnering firm with others may have negative consequences for the focal firm or for its relations. These new collaborations may lead to firms' redrawing boundaries between partners or building bridges between competitors with whom they have had no history of collaboration.

Research analyzing these reflective practices vis-à-vis contextual elements is lacking, despite calls for research to move beyond the dyadic relationship and to broaden its focus to triadic and multilateral cooperation embedded in a constantly evolving relational environment. Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016), for instance, called on coopetition researchers to study dyadic interactions in the context in which those interactions are embedded. These interactions take place in a relational context that morphs relationships in the long-term, potentially leading to new relationships being created or others being terminated. Because the relationship perspective does not account for such multifaceted and generative interactions, though, researchers are left with a weak toolkit for uncovering the intricate mechanisms by which context affects how coopetition relationships unfold, and vice versa.

All in all, the predominant focus in the relationship perspective has been on maintaining balance in cooperative relationships without acknowledging that these relationships are constantly reshaped over time by the successive interactions between the engaged parties. Thus, recursively reconstructing coopetition has not been a focal concern in the relationship perspective. The three limitations outlined above have led to coopetition research that provides snapshot explanations of an interactional phenomenon, leaving ample room for complementary explanations of cooperative dynamics.

3. The interaction perspective on coopetition

Drawing on Coleman (1990) and Felin et al. (2015), we argue that we need to employ a microfoundation approach to move away from the aggregate level and focus on individuals' practices, experiences, and interactions creating a flow of cooperative and competitive actions and reactions over time. This flow is the basis for the changes that take place in cooperative relationships at the aggregate level. The changes at the interorganizational level are social outcomes of partners' ongoing interactions at the micro level. This means that changes in the coopetition interplay which occur at the aggregate level are cultivated through cooperative dynamics at the micro level.

By studying the micro-level interactions, researchers can better understand the mechanisms and intricate workings of individuals' and firms' actions and responses over time and how these actions and responses are linked to different relational states of coopetition. In line with Laamanen and Wallin (2009), we argue that the relational state at time t provides the conditions for both partners' actions at that time, but these conditions are also constructed by surprises and unexpected events that might occur and are influenced by the relational context at the time. Partners' actions and responses to each other's moves affect the

relational state in $t + 1$, which might give rise to new surprises and unexpected events and alter the relational context and its influence on the partners' conditions for action in $t + 1$. As the coopetition process continues and evolves, these conditions affect partners' future moves. Previous research frequently refers to the relevance of coopetitors' interaction (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Ranganathan et al., 2018), yet only a few studies have provided a processual account of these interactions and partners' responses and counter-responses (for exceptions, see Dahl, 2014; Galkina & Lundgren-Henriksson, 2017; Tidström & Hagberg-Andersson, 2012; Wilhelm & Sydow, 2018). The interaction perspective we introduce advances a nuanced view of coopetitive dynamics, encouraging researchers to emphasize those concepts that are inextricably linked to a counterparty and to zoom in on the micro processes that evolve through both parties' practices over time. In particular, the interaction perspective provides researchers with interactional concepts and directs scholarly attention to these processes via its three emphases: (i) *reflecting-in-action*, which helps overcome the cognitivist bias in current research; (ii) *coopetition work propelling temporal interactions*, a notion that foregrounds the temporal flow of change and considers how the shadows of the past and the shadows of the future intermesh with changes in partners' situated actions, and (iii) *relational embeddedness and cascading uncertainty*, which helps explain coopetitive dynamics because it considers partners' interactions and moves as inextricably linked to the relational context in which they occur. Next, we discuss each emphasis of the interaction perspective in more detail.

3.1. Reflecting-in-action

The relationship perspective sees coopetition as paradoxical and cognitively demanding, putting managers in a situation in which they cognitively struggle with tensions. The interaction perspective complements this view by conceiving of coopetition as a dynamic process that consists of discrete temporal actions and partners' responses to such actions. This implies that the interaction perspective calls for an identification of organizational actors' actions, situated responses to such actions, and reflective practices. "Reflective practice is an activity intended to explore other 'ways of seeing' than those presenting themselves as the most evident explanation" (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009, p. 1359). Such reflective practices are particularly relevant to coopetition, since discrepancies between a firm's expectations and its experiences with a partner may be surprising and require responses in the moment. While partners work within a relational state that conditions their interactions, their interactions are also generative of surprises and unexpected events, which might in turn change the conditions for their interactions and necessitate reflective practices. In addition, the broader relational context can also offer surprises and influence the conditions underlying partners' interactions. Schön's (1983) concept of reflecting-in-action is helpful here because it focuses on how firms spontaneously respond and improvise when faced with surprises or disturbances in a partner's conduct or context. Seen in this way, surprises are an interactional resource, meaning that researchers need to pay attention to how organizational actors respond to surprises in the midst of their practice, reproducing their coopetitive relationships.

Building on the notion of reflecting-in-action allows to investigate how managers handle different surprises from partners in the midst of action. This notion complements the prevailing cognitivist view of how tensions are constructed and managed, and incorporates what Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) refer to as the flow of—highly significant—interactions in organizational life and the spontaneous reflective responses that occur in them: "namely, reflecting in the midst of action, without interrupting what one is already doing, and reshaping it at the same time" (p. 1340). By acknowledging and accounting for these spontaneous readjustments and improvisational responses to a partner's unexpected behavior, the interaction perspective helps overcome and complements research approaches and explanations that are overly cognitivist.

This cognitivist focus can be seen in how researchers approach and explain coopetitors' responses to contradictions and conflicting demands, a key component of the coopetition research agenda. For instance, researchers have wrestled with how firms deal with the tension for simultaneous knowledge sharing and knowledge protecting. The cognitive view argues that firms need a coopetition mindset to manage the interaction. The interaction perspective allows adopting a more situated approach and paying attention to reflecting-in-action, which can help us understand the underlying mechanisms of knowledge sharing and knowledge protecting that are set in motion through ongoing interactions and reflective practices of the individuals involved. Focusing on reflecting-in-action directs attention to how practices unfold in response to on-the-ground surprises, which can shape practices by leading partners to question whether they should be sharing or protecting knowledge or alter how they do it in the midst of doing so. We argue that two important components of reflecting-in-action in coopetition are surprise and engaged prolepsis, and how the two are related. Both need to be elaborated in more detail.

Surprises or unexpected events, such as a partner changing its plans, behaving opportunistically, or taking on a new partner, can distort cooperation or competition and trigger changes in a relationship, which can be better understood if attention is paid to how the partners' "doings and sayings shape and are being shaped by" such changes (Swärd et al., 2022, p. 2). In the wake of surprises, the partners' expectations of each other's conduct can be challenged or altered, and even the relationship can be redefined through action-reaction cycles. We argue that in those action-reaction cycles, reflecting-in-action is instrumental as it involves situated and often improvisational responses to a surprise or to unexpected partner conduct. Thus, the notion of reflecting-in-action allows us to understand coopetitive dynamics in terms of the flow of situated practices shaping coopetitive relationships as partners spontaneously readjust their interactions in response to surprises. In other words, reflecting-in-action is the reflecting that takes place during spontaneous interactions with partners in action-reaction cycles. Here, building on Yanow and Tsoukas (2009), we argue that a more situated approach to coopetition requires closer attention to different types or intensities of surprises that emerge and affect coopetitive relationships—as opposed to the potentialities in these relationships, such as partner opportunism—and this approach will therefore reveal the responses to such surprises as situated performances of reflecting-in-action. Reflecting-in-action thus moves coopetition research beyond discussing what can *potentially* influence a relationship to the *actual* surprises that actively shape coopetitive relationships. In that way, partners' interaction becomes the main emphasis and means through which coopetitive dynamics are approached.

Reflecting-in-action also involves what we call engaged prolepsis. Prolepsis is the process of anticipating detrimental issues that might escalate and taking measures to proactively overcome them. Engaged prolepsis is a firm's spontaneous, improvisational response to a situation and to a partner's conduct with the ambition to alter the ways of interacting and to morph future expectations and the relationship at large. Engaged prolepsis morphs the coopetitive relationship so that it "follow[s] the ways of the world, as they open up, rather than [seeking] to recover a chain of connections, from an end-point to a starting-point, on a route already travelled" (Ingold, 2010, p. 97). Engaged prolepsis thus refers to the situated practices performed by actors not only to anticipate potential issues but also to bring forth new trajectories for the relationship through deflection, i.e., re-orient the partner's conduct in the interaction and redefine goals and processes in the midst of their actions to ensure smooth continuation in line with their expectations. To identify moments of engaged prolepsis, coopetition scholars need to look at how surprises lead to improvisational responses and how such responses are accomplished to facilitate new trajectories for the relationship.

Overall, by paying closer attention to reflecting-in-action, coopetition scholars can identify actors' specific spontaneous practices when

their experiences with partners are not aligned with their expectations. For example, in their study on the interplay of trust and distrust in cooperative interactions within the robotics and automation industry, [Kostis et al. \(2022\)](#) uncover specific surprises in specific projects and trusting or distrusting practices that the partners engaged in due to the discrepancy between the firm's orientation to behave optimistically and its actual experiences in the course of their interactions in those projects. This study shows that in a cooperative relationship, the reflection on activities is embedded in the practicing of them (and not by stepping back, cognitively assessing, and defining a course of action), which triggers changes in how trust and distrust interrelate. Explicitly adopting the interaction perspective and utilizing the vocabulary we suggest in this paper, the authors could have dug deeper into identifying distinct surprises and distinct modalities of engaged prolepsis.

3.2. Cooperation work propelling temporal interactions

The second key pillar of the interaction perspective is its emphasis on the cooperation work that propels temporal interactions. By placing emphasis on the partners' temporal interactions and on the evolving nature of cooperative and competitive activities, the interaction perspective directs scholarly attention towards foregrounding cooperation work. Building on the emerging literature on boundary work, "defined as purposeful individual and collective effort to influence the social, symbolic, material or temporal boundaries, demarcations and distinctions affecting groups, occupations and organizations" ([Langley et al., 2019](#), p. 2), we introduce the notion of *cooperation work* which allows for a processual view of cooperation to be articulated. We define cooperation work as the ongoing and purposeful efforts of individuals and organizations to influence collaborative and competitive orientations within a cooperative relationship, to be responsive to their own and partners' situated practices, and to cultivate further changes in how they and their partners engage in cooperative and competitive efforts in the future.

Boundaries are especially important in cooperation as the logics of cooperation and competition are contradictory, and therefore encourage competitors to work not only to create and maintain boundaries and leverage them to keep partners at a distance, but also to work at the boundaries to facilitate exchanges and collaboration. Importantly, cooperation work involves both upholding the boundaries between competitors and cultivating conditions to span or cross such boundaries ([Barrett et al., 2012](#); [Bechky, 2006](#); [Keszey, 2018](#); [Marrone et al., 2007](#)), thereby supporting both, competitive and collaborative efforts. The focus on cooperation work in the interaction perspective acknowledges that boundaries between competitors are always in flux and continuously in a state of becoming.

Temporality is thus central to the study of cooperation work and requires researchers to pay attention to how timing and the sequence of partners' actions and the interrelatedness of a response to a partner's action in the present, past experiences, and future expectations. An emphasis on cooperation work propelling temporal interactions encourages researchers to look much more closely at how time and interactions interrelate, meaning not only how interactions unfold over time but also how past and future are integral parts of present cooperative interactions (see [Pattinson et al., 2018](#)). In this sense, the (re-) construction of boundaries and working at or through boundaries are impacted by time and the ways in which competitors intermesh past, present, and the future.

Drawing on literature devoted to interactions within interorganizational projects ([Jones & Lichtenstein, 2008](#)), which oftentimes involve cooperation ([Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016](#); [Kostis et al., 2022](#); [Rouyre & Fernandez, 2019](#); [Yami & Neme, 2014](#)), we argue that understanding temporal interaction requires considering "the time periods before and after a focal project [or interaction], during which the participants may already have worked together or expect to work together again, respectively" ([Ligthart et al., 2016](#), p. 1722). By taking into

consideration the impact of time on cooperation, the possible tensions, emerging conflicts, surprises, or unexpected partners' actions are not viewed as isolated in time, but as parts of a flow of past, present, and future interactions that condition how firms cope with the unexpectedness in cooperation, reconfigure cooperation and competition over time, and engage in more- or less-cooperative or competitive actions.

This view of time in the interaction perspective makes it possible for researchers to study cooperation emergence, which we call on more researchers to do and thus add to a growing body of literature studying this phenomenon ([Efrat et al., 2022](#); [Monticelli et al., 2023](#); [Pattinson et al., 2018](#)). How organizations cooperate and compete is influenced by both the shadows and learnings from past cooperation experiences ([Dahl, 2014](#)) as well as shadows of the future and what benefits organizations expect based on present resource commitments ([Ansari et al., 2016](#)).

From an interaction perspective, cooperation is viewed as constantly emerging with two key characteristics: "long" time horizon (i.e., duration) and dynamic scope (re-configuring boundaries and functions of the interaction over time) ([Efrat et al., 2022](#)). First, the time horizon is long in the sense that any cooperative or competitive action and response are part of a sequence of partners' moves that take place within an extended temporal space where the past, the present, and the future are entwined. Second, the scope is dynamic given that firms can alter the boundaries between them and add or reduce activities the firms collaborate and compete on. As the above reasoning makes clear, researchers need to consider the temporal dimension of cooperative interactions because managers place partners' actions and potential surprises in a time horizon that includes a long-term past and future interactions, and managers respond accordingly, even engaging in strategic forbearance and nonresponse when a partner behaves unexpectedly (see [Andreuski & Miller, 2022](#)). Uncovering such situated actions and responses both within and over time, and their sequencing, has to a large extent been neglected by prior research and is part of the suggested interaction perspective on cooperation, as actions and responses are viewed as parts of an extended flow of activities taking place over time.

A key building block of the interaction perspective is thus its expanded temporal focus and the consequences of accounting for how that broader temporal conception relates to cooperation work. We thus urge cooperation scholars to build on this view and incorporate this logic in future studies. For instance, [Swärd et al. \(2022\)](#) show that in the light of surprises in interorganizational relationships, the interplay of trust and control is conditioned by action–reaction cycles that take place over time due to events disrupting the relationship and partners' expectations of each other. Such action–reaction cycles, in which both parties are involved, are influenced by time as in the light of a new surprise (due to misalignment of expectations and experiences in the present), a new action–reaction cycle redefines the trusting–controlling domain and creates new expectations for the partners. Also, [Wilhelm and Sydow \(2018\)](#) study carmakers' approaches to managing the tensions of cooperation and their suppliers' subsequent responses to those approaches in a processual manner. Thereby the authors were able to identify emergence of responses and counter–responses that relate both positively and negatively to tension dynamics.

Building on the above, we argue that managers' reactions to partners' actions in cooperation are fundamentally shaped by partners' interactions ([Klein et al., 2020](#)) and their past experiences and expectations of future interactions (c.f., [Poppo et al., 2008](#)). This argument also resonates with the competitive dynamics literature which highlights that "each strategic action undertaken by a firm is constrained by its prior moves and, in turn, limits future moves" ([Chen & Miller, 2012](#), p. 146). For instance, [Kostis et al. \(2022\)](#) show that as firms within the robotics and automation industry compete for one project but will likely collaborate in a future one, they tend to engage in both trusting and distrusting. Since any firm will likely depend on their competitor to contribute to a joint project in the future, they share important knowledge among each other with confidence. This example shows that the shadow of the future makes the firms within this industry engage in

strategic forbearance, reflecting the role of temporal interactions. This brings us to the third key aspect on which the interaction perspective places emphasis: relational embeddedness and associated cascading uncertainty.

3.3. Relational embeddedness and cascading uncertainty

The third pillar of the interaction perspective orients cooperation researchers to consider the broader relational context in which partners are embedded, and how it influences partners' interactions and responses to each other and to potential surprises. Dyadic cooperative interactions influence and are influenced by other firms and relationships in their network (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), and to understand cooperative dynamics the connection between dyadic and network level interactions need to be scrutinized (Klein et al., 2020). In the related field of competitive dynamics, Chen and Miller (2012) argue that the field needs to move beyond seeing a dyad of firms in combat, and instead take a relational view that accounts for the other stakeholders that directly or indirectly influence a given dyadic relationship. Similarly, Andreuski and Miller (2022) underscore that in rivalry firms often purposefully engage in strategic forbearance, considering not only the competitive moves of a rival, but also other stakeholders, partners, and rivals in the same relational context. Further support for this view can be found in Kostis et al. (2022), who studied cooperative interactions in a project-based setting and found that for firms involved in simultaneous projects with several actors, uncertainty stems not only from how partners behave in the current project, but also from how partners behave in parallel or future projects. In addition unpredictability in dyadic relationships in such relational contexts also comes from third parties, such as powerful customers or suppliers.

The interaction perspective advances our understanding of cooperative dynamics by suggesting, based on these studies, that researchers need to identify the firms and relationships that can influence two partners' interactions and each partner's responses to unexpected actions. Emphasis needs to be placed on what we call relational embeddedness, which includes cascading uncertainty defined as the inherent unpredictability diffused in multiple interactions that have both complex interdependencies and are in continuous flux. Thus, cascading uncertainty is a result of interdependencies among different interactions, and the challenge of anticipating the lasting influence of multiple diverse relationships in the context. Cascading uncertainty, accordingly, occurs when the interactions in one relationship are unpredictable at time t , and this unpredictability cascades and spreads to other relationships at time $t + 1$.

Relational embeddedness can manifest in different ways, and cascading uncertainty is particularly important because it affects the dynamic interplay in cooperation in two important ways. First, in the light of a surprise or unexpected partner action, a firm may consider that counterattacking will trigger either positive or negative consequences for other partners or firms in the same relational context, thus prompting it to make additional cooperative or competitive moves in the future. Uncertainty is therefore diffused, influencing a firm's situated actions and interactions, and determines how intensely the firm cooperates and competes. *Second*, cascading uncertainty is also important because the interactions and exchanges between other firms in the focal firm's network may render the interactions with a firm's partner or rival unpredictable. For instance, imagine firm A, which has a long-standing, well-functioning history of cooperation with firm B. Firm B behaves opportunistically in its relationships with other firms in the same relational context, although the relationship between A and B is well-functioning, firm A will face cascading uncertainty and potential negative reputational consequences if it maintains its tie with firm B. Thus, firm A might be encouraged to alter its actions altering the emphasis placed on cooperative or competitive efforts in relation to firm B.

Relational embeddedness means that firms are continuously readjusting their relationships and altering the emphasis of their cooperation

efforts—from cooperative to competitive and back again. Thus, studying the range of a firm's actions and relational moves in a broader and wider context may help us to more clearly understand what propels the mix of cooperation and competition in a relationship and how cooperation and competition intensities alter in a given dyadic cooperative relationship over time. Accordingly, a more comprehensive understanding of cooperative dynamics requires an extension of the analysis to a firm's broader relational context considering a wider set of firms that can directly or indirectly trigger changes in the situated practices and interactions and readjustments of their cooperative relationships. Therefore, for researchers to uncover the intricate mechanisms that propel cooperation and that influence the dynamic cooperative interaction over time, they must study situated partners' actions in relation to the context (Majchrzak et al., 2015).

While the interaction perspective and its study of processes related to cascading uncertainty is key to understanding cooperative dynamics, this perspective can also be fruitful for studying other types of uncertainty in cooperation relationships. The main focus of prior cooperation research on the dyad level, for instance, is predominantly on how firms mitigate behavioral uncertainty. This research has primarily investigated either a single partner's unpredictable future behavior or a partner's opportunism, defined as "behaviour by a partner firm that is motivated to pursue self-interest with deceit to achieve gains at the expense of the other alliance members" (Das & Rahman, 2010, p. 57) or as "strategic non-disclosure, disguise, or distortion of information" (Williamson, 1985, p. 57). Partner opportunism is a major concern in interorganizational relationships (Cao & Lumineau, 2015; Carson et al., 2006; Lumineau & Quélin, 2012), especially in relationships (Krishnan et al., 2006). Concerns about partner opportunism in cooperation are amplified because while cooperation can be highly beneficial for a firm, it can also be catastrophic (Bouncken & Kraus, 2013). The unique benefits of cooperation, such as improved innovation outcomes for partnering firms (Gnyawali & Park, 2011; Park et al., 2014), are clear, but so too is the greater likelihood that knowledge will leak out (Rouyre & Fernandez, 2019) and that the partner will imitate best practices and know-how (Fernandez et al., 2014; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009). Because these behavioral and cascading uncertainties are present in cooperation and challenge partners' interactions, future research needs to incorporate them into its study of partners' situated actions and interactions, since doing so may help us decipher the mechanisms that are propelling the so-called cooperation interplay.

4. Methodological implications of the interaction perspective

The interaction perspective directs researchers' attention to identifying the mechanisms that give rise to the dynamic interplay of cooperation and it introduces a new vocabulary for articulating how this interplay unfolds over time and why it unfolds as it does. It also has methodological implications that go beyond the methodological repertoire currently used in cooperation studies.

Because the interaction perspective is focused on uncovering temporal interactions and puts such an emphasis on time and the impacts it has on cooperative interaction, the interaction perspective requires process studies (Berends & Deken, 2021; Langley & Tsoukas, 2017) that zoom in on specific events, surprises, and actions, as well as study of how these activities occur as cooperation is being developed in its continuously evolving process of becoming. Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori (2019) introduced a methodology for studying contradictory and paradoxical phenomena, and in line with their approach we propose that researchers studying cooperation do three things: (1) collect data from key partners and individuals and follow events as they are (re-)configured within cooperative relationships to identify and explore interdependencies, and thus track boundaries and document how individuals in cooperative relationships interact with those boundaries over time; (2) collect longitudinal data and track cooperation partners' reflecting-in-action to identify relational shifts in cooperation; and (3)

collect data from multiple stakeholders and sites and use the analytical tool of zooming in and zooming out to follow dynamic interactions in the relational context. Below, we briefly discuss each of these three methodological recommendations.

- (1) The interaction perspective requires studying partners' interactions over a long period of time to deepen our understanding of cooperative dynamics, and cooperation research will benefit from having the traditional focus on action-response dyads broadened to include extended interaction sequences and episodes (cf. Ferrier, 2001; Klein et al., 2020; Lamberg et al., 2009). For researchers, this means studying the overall flow of interactions and how these interactions relate to partners' past experiences and expected future actions. Focusing greater attention on the flow of interactions also requires blurring the definition between action and response, since it is impossible to easily determine clear beginnings and ends (and, relatedly, which actors are behind "initial" actions). Chen and Miller (2012) show why focusing on the flow of interactions necessarily moves the focus away from individual actions and responses. In their example of how a price-war rivalry plays out, firm A cuts prices, rival B follows suit, and rival C interprets B's action as an aggressive move, forcing A to respond by cutting prices again or altering its strategy. "In such processes, it is best to look for interactions and sequences of moves; that is, to move toward a general theory of action (Smith et al., 1992, 2001), rather than to characterize dyads of actions and responses" (Chen & Miller, 2012, p. 171). Following events over the long term to identify how they (re-)configure cooperative relationships will move cooperation research closer to developing the general theory of action that Chen and Miller called for.
- (2) Cooperation researchers need to do more longitudinal fieldwork, by digitally and physically shadowing one individual's interactions over time to construct rich narratives that will uncover situated practices, reflecting-in-action, responses, and surprises. Cooperation research has carried out many qualitative studies (especially case studies), but their primary focus has been on organizational-level constructs, such as governance and management arrangements, rather than on managerial behavior and practices (Dorn et al., 2016). Shadowing methods are better for uncovering this behavior and these practices (McDonald, 2005). The interaction perspective also directs researchers' attention in ways that will lead to new answers and approaches to the microfoundations of cooperation, including accounts of temporality, engaged parties' situated reflecting-in-action and interactions, and the role of partners' embedded relational context. The new approaches that result will lead to more-solid and more-thorough answers.
- (3) Cooperation research also needs to take advantage of technology that allows researchers to collect necessary and relevant data for understanding key foundations of cooperative relationships, partner interactions, and practices. Online ethnographies and multiplayer online video games are just two examples of novel methods that will allow researchers to zoom in on situated practices and zoom out to the relational context in which such practices appear. This task is challenging, but these settings are where cooperation takes place. Researchers can also design experiments to instigate surprises, study moments of reflecting-in-action, and investigate how surprises and engaged prolepsis are related. Quasi-experiments are especially well-suited for studying the flow of interactions over time (Grant & Wall, 2009), since in cooperation settings the shadow of the past, the shadow of the future, and uncertainty cascade. Using simulations in research, such as strategy games, are particularly promising for better understanding the sequence of partners' interactions, which can be analyzed using relational event modeling (Schechter et al., 2018).

Another potential source of inspiration and ideas is social science fiction (Buchanan & Hällgren, 2019), which can help researchers understand how competitors interact over time. The series "The Blacklist" is a good example. In this series Raymond Reddington is one of the most wanted fugitives, yet when he starts collaborating with the FBI and helping its agents solve cases, he also benefits over time from the relationship. This social science fiction can be a source for identifying trust and distrust dynamics over time as well as for understanding the relational context in which those dynamics appear.

Data for the interaction perspective can also be captured using other observational methods, including ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and systematic self-observation (see Rynes & Gephart, 2004). Ethnomethodology uses practical methods "to construct and maintain a sensible understanding of the social world" (p. 459); conversational analysis makes it possible to study sequential talk and conversation; and systematic self-observation trains informants to capture aspects of their lived experience and interactions and to reflect on them by talking through them or writing them out. Cooperation research thus needs to find new and creative sources for data, including archival material, email exchanges and chat logs, individual diaries, and internal project diaries—all of which can provide valuable insights that, when combined, can give us a much clearer picture of how cooperation unfolds in practice.

These expanded data sources correspond to the broadened view of cooperation research in the interaction perspective, with its focus on uncovering how actions trigger different responses. The main data source for cooperation research has been the single firm over a limited period of time. To get a deeper, more-comprehensive understanding of cooperation in the interaction perspective, researchers need longitudinal study designs and an expanded repertoire of methodological tools and data sources such as those outlined above. The novel and creative interaction perspective encourages cooperation researchers to be just as novel and creative in the methods they use to study cooperation phenomena. This conceptual paper gives cooperation researchers both concrete examples and ideas that they can expand on to develop their own novel and creative methods for their empirical work.

5. Discussion

This paper identifies the problems and limitations of the relationship perspective on cooperation and its suitability to shed light on the dynamic nature of cooperation. We connect to an emerging stream of research articulating concerns about stagnation and fragmentation due to unconnected and scattered theoretical ideas (Bouncken et al., 2015; Dorn et al., 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018), and questioning fundamental aspects in how the phenomenon has been studied (c.f., Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). The interaction perspective responds to these concerns by opening up new research avenues for revitalizing cooperation theorizing. Our aim in introducing the interaction perspective is to complement existing cooperation research and to help the field see the more-processual nature of cooperative relationships. We suggest a turn towards microfoundations view of cooperation, which highlights the partners' situated actions and responses that propel moves between relational states of cooperation on the interorganizational level over time. The interaction perspective is novel, and its three emphases and complementary foci will help us better understand cooperative dynamics and develop new areas of research (see Table 1).

The interaction perspective offers a more nuanced than current views of cooperative dynamics, and its instrumental constructs emphasize reflecting-in-action, the cooperation work that propels the temporal dynamic interplay, and relational embeddedness. It is a theoretical toolkit that, used systematically and rigorously, can guide future research and stimulate debate on the dynamic nature of cooperation. Below, we discuss the four core contributions of our paper and detail

Table 1
How the interaction perspective on coopetition complements the relationship perspective.

| Key limitations of the relationship perspective | How the interaction perspective addresses these limitations | Why and how it matters | Suggestions for future research... |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p><i>Emphasis on cognitivist explanations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers as cognitive operators - Stresses cognitive activities and intentionality | <p><i>Emphasis on reflecting-in-action</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinguishes between dynamic interplay on the interorganizational level and competition dynamics on the micro level. - Zooms in on situated partners' actions and interactions, seeing managers as agents who spontaneously respond to paradoxical situations by improvising, acting, and interacting with others. - Shows how managers' possibilities for action take place amid unfolding practices - Calls on researchers to see particular actions and lived experiences as part of a flow and to see how coopetition is interactively accomplished over time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enable an understanding of intricate cooperative dynamics by focusing on the multifaceted nature of surprises and how surprises can disrupt how a relationship unfolds - Directs researchers' attention to the reflective interventions, engaged prolepsis, and situated practices that occur in response to surprises and partners' unexpected actions - Encourages researchers to see coopetition as being accomplished through managers' embodied agency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on the action-reaction cycles through which the cooperation and competition aspects of coopetition are shaped and re-shaped over time - on how emerging coopetition develops through cycles of sensemaking and sensegiving - on how managers engage with and shape cooperative relationships through their discursive practices, interpersonal interactions, and reflexive sensegiving - on how surprise and engaged prolepsis and improvisations are related |
| <p><i>Emphasis on aggregate relational states and balance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation and competition as opposing forces within a relatively stable relationship - Conception of time as clock time in stages of driver-process-outcomes models - Seeks balance of cooperation and competition; instability seen as a threat | <p><i>Emphasis on coopetition work propelling temporal interactions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instability is an integral and inexorable element of social interactions in coopetition, and manifests as multiple flows of surprises, uncertainties, reflective interventions, and re-adjustments, with distinct temporalities constantly at play on the interaction level - Managers shape the coopetition interplay through flows of actions that have converged in the past and are expected to converge in the future - Encourages rethinking the notion of balance and urges research to focus on coopetition as a phenomenon in constant flux | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledges temporal flow of change and how the shadows of the past and shadows of the future both influence the interaction, and trigger changes amid partners' situated actions - Approaching cooperative dynamics as patterns of change that occur because managers are involved in multiple and always-evolving temporalities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on how competitors incorporate time in their interactions with partners - on how the shadows of the past and the shadow of the future are intertwined with experiences and decisions in the present - on how time horizons are constructed and how they impact how relationships are managed - on how coopetition work is a process of (re-)constructing boundaries - on the temporal dynamics of coopetition work |
| <p><i>Emphasis on dis-embedded coopetition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation and competition are outcomes of an interactive process on the interorganizational level - Neglects the broader relational context within which coopetition takes place | <p><i>Emphasis on relational embeddedness and cascading uncertainty</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperative interaction takes place in a relational context in which coopetition is recursively reconstructed - Relational embeddedness means unpredictability and instability are injected and diffused via cascading uncertainties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because the interaction perspective sees partners and their interactions as embedded, it illuminates how this context influences partners' interactions and responses to each other and how this embeddedness influences potentialities - Calls for attention to a key driver of cooperative dynamics: cascading uncertainty, defined as the diffuse unpredictability in interactions resulting both from the relational complexities inherent in contemporary multifaceted business interactions and from the challenge of anticipating how other relationships influence influences dyadic interactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on how uncertainty cascades from one interaction to another - on how the complex interdependencies that are in continuous flux and that are inherent in contemporary multifaceted business interactions lead to diffuse unpredictability in interactions - on how unpredictability is cultivated through interactions in one relationship at time t and then cascades and spreads to other relationships at time $t + 1$ - on collective action problems and interdependencies among interactions in different relationships, and to research on the challenge of anticipating the lasting influence of multiple diverse relationships in a relational context |

how the interaction perspective extends and expands our current understanding of coopetition. We also specify directions for future research as well as outline its limitations.

First, the interaction perspective can help reconcile the debate on how coopetition interplay (occurring on the relationship level) and the intricate cooperative dynamics (occurring on the interaction level) are related by establishing how a microfoundations approach (cf. Felin et al., 2015) can augment theorizing on coopetition. As a basis for the interaction perspective, microfoundations, “the underlying individual-level and group-level actions that shape strategy, organization, and, more broadly, dynamic capabilities, and lead to the emergence of superior organization-level performance” (Eisenhardt et al., 2010, p. 1263), can help coopetition overcome a key limitation that has impeded progress in understanding the dynamic nature of coopetition: namely, the tautological way in which cooperative dynamics and coopetition interplay are treated.

The interaction perspective not only provides conceptual clarity regarding interplay and dynamics, but also articulates a vocabulary that

can support deeper insights into existing concepts, such as coopetition capability (Rai et al., 2022). A few scholars have tried to clarify cooperative dynamics by incorporating concepts from the competitive dynamics literature into coopetition research (Klein et al., 2020; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in press). Yet, the bridge between the two literatures has provided only few insights into the action-reaction interaction cycles that shape partners' future moves. The conceptual toolkit and vocabulary provided in this article can allow researchers to reach a deeper understanding of such action-reaction cycles and more-clearly conceptualize the link between coopetition interplay and cooperative dynamics. Cooperative dynamics develop from the reflecting-in-action and coopetition work that occur within a relational context and ultimately affect the dynamic cooperative interplay on the interorganizational level. Understanding cooperative dynamics better requires more research on the action-reaction cycles that shape aspects of cooperation and competition over time (cf. Swärd et al., 2022), which the interaction perspective does by accounting for microfoundations, temporality, and the notion of surprise.

Uncovering partners' situated actions, and temporally and relationally embodied interactions, and incorporating surprises and mechanisms of coping would enrich the body of literature looking at the cooptation interplay on the interorganizational level (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, in press; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018). Digging into the microfoundations of cooptation can provide a more nuanced understanding of the underlying practices and processes that influence the intensity of and the balance between cooperation and competition. For instance, the interaction perspective can help researchers identify how the cooptation mechanisms—mutuality, rivalrous spirit, resource relevance, and resource commitment—that Gnyawali and Ryan Charleton (2018) identified emerge in the first place. Drawing on the interaction perspective, future research can uncover how mutuality and rivalrous spirit are morphed through partners' interactions, or how resource relevance and commitments are re-shaped over time through partners' reflecting-in-action and cooptation work in the light of unexpected events. Further, being directed towards microfoundations may lead to deeper insights into how emerging cooptation develops through cycles of sensemaking and sensegiving (Dwyer et al., 2023; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Pattinson et al., 2018), in which partners may engage strategically (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), thereby nurturing changes in the cooperation-competition interplay on the aggregate level. Researchers need to investigate these aspects of cooptation more closely and research how managers' discursive activities are related (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) and how their interpersonal interactions (Marchington & Vincent, 2004; Pearce, 2001) and even reflexive sensegiving (see Khilberg & Linberg, 2021) shape the cooperative relationship.

Our second contribution is our argument that the notion of balance in cooptation needs to be rethought and that research needs to focus on cooptation as a phenomenon in constant flux. The interaction perspective provides a conceptual grounding for researchers to investigate this constantly fluctuating phenomenon and identify new approaches for studying the dynamic nature of cooptation and its changing patterns. The conceptual framework of the interaction perspective connects to and extends the growing body of research that treats cooptation as an emergent phenomenon and that acknowledges how time impacts interactions and the balancing acts within cooptation, thereby calling into question whether balance matters (Dahl, 2014; Efrat et al., 2022; Pattinson et al., 2018). We thus support and enrich recent criticism regarding the need to balance cooperation and competition (see, e.g., Bengtsson et al., 2016; Gnyawali et al., 2016; Lindström & Polsa, 2016; Bahar et al., 2022; Park et al., 2014; Raza-Ullah, Bengtsson & Kock, 2014). A cooperative relationship is seldom “in balance,” and might not even need to be. Instead, researchers should pay attention to what occurs on the micro level, which is where temporal interactions are propelled and where shifts between relational states on the aggregate level are nurtured. The balancing act depends on the situation and changes over time which reside in the interactions among competitors. Enacting a cooperation-dominant or a competition-dominant approach and not balancing the two forces can be desired in some situations. In fact, a balancing act may even create negative repercussions in business relationships in some contexts or instances. Striving for balance in one relationship might severely hamper a firm's relationship with other actors in the relational context, and might therefore be an undesirable aim. Therefore, we call on researchers to move beyond balance and instead investigate the pattern of change and intricate mechanisms on the micro level that are brought about by managers' involvement in multiple and always-evolving temporalities.

The third contribution of the interaction perspective is its focus on what occurs within boundaries. The interaction perspective turns researchers' attention to investigating how competitors' interactions and engagements at, for, and through boundaries change over time, as well as to investigating competitors' interactions and engagement with non-human agents. These non-human entities, such as material objects and

digital technologies, can profoundly impact cooperative interactions, and therefore researchers should investigate the emerging digital technologies that are increasingly interwoven with organizing and have integral constellations of relations through which boundary-related functions are performed (Bailey et al., 2022). Algorithmic affordances (Kellogg et al., 2020), for instance, can lead to competitors working in new ways, since these affordances make it possible to monitor partners' actions more closely and minutely in real time, which in turn can shape the interaction dynamics. Accordingly, we need to expand the entities we include in our analyses to include both human and non-human, and consider how, for instance, data and the need for data work emerge and influence cooperative interactions.

The fourth contribution of the interaction perspective is encapsulating key elements that cooptation scholars have acknowledged as essential for cooptation and that have been at the top of their agendas, but have yet to make their way into actualized research. Part of this contribution is also linking ideas that have only recently been connected. For instance, even though Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) have called for researchers to systematically analyze and more-deeply account for the broader relational context in which a dyadic relationship is embedded, we do not have cooptation research that does so. The interaction perspective gives new life to this call by introducing a set of constructs, such as relational embeddedness and cascading uncertainty, that explain why it is important for researchers to account for the relational context and how they can do so. The interaction perspective also provides a new framework for studying the key challenges of opportunism and behavioral uncertainty. While consistently identifying them as challenges, cooptation research has studied them as part of tensions and not as standalone facets of relational embeddedness affecting dyadic cooptation relationships. The relational embeddedness of the interaction perspective questions this approach and calls on researchers to thoroughly investigate relational complexities and interdependencies. Similarly, the notion of cascading uncertainty in the interaction perspective is important because it recognizes how difficult it is for partners to foresee how actions and reactions in one relationship affect other relationships, and how those actions and reactions bring uncertainty for the managers involved. Taken together, we believe that the interaction perspective will inspire additional research into the cooperative dynamics, research that is certainly needed.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Angelos Kostis: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Sascha Albers:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Johanna Vanderstraeten:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Sameer Chincharikar:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. **Maria Bengtsson:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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