

Coopetition in network football clubs

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Abstract:

The concept of coopetition was examined by many researches, especially in business-to-business context. They mainly investigated strategies implemented by and among enterprises for cooperative and competitive goals. Focusing on strategies is not enough. There is a need to take a look at cooperation and competition in a different way, especially for new types of organizations. Such a new type of organization is network enterprise. It consists of a group of entities which are connected each other by a network of joint relations. Network enterprise exists to achieve certain goals. Football clubs have similar structures and characteristics as network enterprises have. They act also as network organization. What is more, economic theories of enterprise from the new institutional economics, explicitly the agency theory and the theory of transaction costs, are used to study acting of network enterprises, involving also functioning of football clubs. Numerous researches showed that there are many causes why network enterprises are created and developed. These include, among others, raising competitiveness, achieving higher financial results and using more resources because of wider access. Network organization is market nexus of contracts which have very often temporary character. On one hand the partners in such enterprise want to reach the most effective level of cooperation, but on the other hand they want to maintain the lowest possible level of uncertainty, information asymmetry and risk aversion. Network of reciprocal relations between them allow them to act as one entity and fulfill specific functions. Among these entities there are cooperative and competitive relationships. When cooperation and competition occur together, they constitute coopetition which is a basis in the network enterprise. In the activities of the football clubs one can also notice phenomenon of coopetition, for example in the movement of players (transfers). This paper is focused on justifying of existence of coopetition in football clubs and demonstrating importance of coopetition in functioning of network football clubs. The analysis starts with conceptualization of the research problem in order to bring closer the phenomenon of coopetition. Then there is deeper presented network coopetition as one of the levels of cooperative relations.

Key Words: network enterprise, coopetition, co-creating value, professional football, football club.

Introduction

Network enterprise was defined by many researchers. For the purpose of this discussion networks will be taken to mean long-term agreements between various profit-oriented companies that allow them to gain or maintain competitive advantage over non-network enterprises by optimizing operating costs and minimizing coordination costs. Entities included in the network are independent and mutual relations between them are crucial for their competitive position (Jarillo, 1995, p.149). Network enterprise is commonly understood to mean an organizational structure created around economic projects carried out by various parts of different entities cooperating with each other, creating a network of connections. These connections last during the implementation of a given project and transform themselves into a different network when executing a new project (Castells, 2003, pp. 80-81).

In sport, for example in football clubs, one can notice similar characteristics as networks have. Their structure can be generally illustrated as horizontal or heterarchical with key participant which manages the entire network enterprise (Szortyka, 2020, p. 2953). Since football is a team-sport game, between team members occur cooperation. Participants of game have the same goal despite of the fact that they have different roles. In football or in basketball there is central entity (point guard position) which is essential to connect the team members and arrange the attacking manner (Clemente et al., 2015, p. 216).

A football club, functioning in a market environment, has the characteristics of a firm. Football club is a type of a firm which acts in the market economy system (Boehlke, 2020, p. 1066). However there are no doubts that excluding some non-monetary values (e.g. providing entertainment, promoting healthy lifestyle, self-development) the football clubs generate significant revenues (Jaworska, 2020, pp. 1190-1191). It is worth to add that the sport is a sector where traditional rules of economy do not work. What is more, there should be taken into account an individual player for whom the achievement of position of absolute prominence is less beneficial than that hypothetically possible in a case of perfect competition (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 5). So as to

include sport to traditional economy principles, Neale distinguishes between sporting and economic competition. According to the economic theory the firm is a league concentrated on demand, cost and profit adjustments. In the situation when there are two firms trying to catch talents, quasi-rent will be very likely greater than when only one side is interested in the player in bilateral bargaining. It is known that league firms commonly disallow multiple bidding by their component entities, so counterbidding may arise only from two independent leagues. Accordingly occurrence of economically but not sporting competing leagues increase money costs to both leagues and it threatens profits (Neale, 1964, pp. 1-14).

The participants of the network enterprise face the necessity to achieve goals: their own and the entire organization. Both types of goals should give them benefits. The members cooperate with each other within this network enterprise, but also compete for jointly provided services – there exist simultaneous competitive and cooperative behaviour. It is together called as a cooptation (Najda-Janoszka, 2010, p. 35). One needs to notice separation of cooperation and competition, which means that related entities clearly define the areas in which they cooperate and compete. Thanks to isolation of these zones, it is possible for competitors to compete on specific markets and within a specific product offer, while at the same time they can cooperate with another offer on other markets. Such definition of operating conditions allows for effective coordination of activities as part of their development strategies and cooptation (Bengtsson, Kock, 2000, pp. 411-426).

In cooperative models, all players in a particular sector, also in a sport sector, forms a systemic network for creating value. Each participant proceeds as complementor of others what means that all business relationships between players rely on complementarity (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 3). W. Czakon emphasizes that cooptation as a subject of research is not characteristic of competition with cooperators or cooperation with competitors, but it is distinguished by simultaneous consideration of two processes: value creation and value appropriation. The process of creating value requires combining complementary resources and identical strategies by cooperating entities. On the other hand, the process of value appropriation in its essence should take into account the initial contribution of all the involved enterprises and subsequent activity of inter-organizational relations. In long term the process should provide the possibility to retain, by the generating parties, higher value than they are able to achieve independently. In other words, cooptation connects both processes without focusing solely on the essence of relations between the parties (Czakon, 2009, p. 13).

The objective of this article is to justify the cooptation occurrence in network football clubs and also explain how it affects functioning of the clubs. The following research questions were formulated:

- What are the main reasons of undertaking cooptation by network football clubs?
- How is cooptation regulated in network football clubs?

Material & methods

Participants

To the analysis of cooptation there were taken into account football clubs. The football clubs have alike structure and characteristics as network enterprises have. Therefore, they are called network football clubs. In the process of analyzing football clubs it should be considered that there are also similarities to networks in the way of functioning and how it affects the development of analyzed units.

Procedure

The study aimed to justify and explain the occurrence of cooptation in network football clubs. The analysis started with reviewing the literature and illustrate cooptation, not only in general terms, but also in specific network environment. For this reason there was taken into consideration network cooptation with its types. All this became the basis for considering network cooptation in football clubs. It means that the results of studying cooptation and network cooptation were the starting point for analyzing specific cooptation relations which appear in football club as a network enterprise. Formulating conclusions in the research procedure was possible thanks to the use of descriptive and comparative analysis.

Material

The analysis of the phenomenon of cooptation considered in the paper was based on the review of literature. The literature studies constitute the framework for conceptualization of cooptation in general, situations in which it occurs and also its advantages and disadvantages. They constitute also basic material to answer the research questions and draw conclusions about network cooptation in relation to football clubs.

Results

Cooptation

Significant and rapid changes in business environment demand implementing new strategic solutions. Enterprises search for innovative and effective sources of competitive advantage. They are interested in new possibilities of development in relations with competitors. One of the solution is cooptation. This term is built from combination of two words: cooperation and competition. Cooptation refers to a situation when competitors begin to establish cooperative relationships and it is beneficial for them (Cygler, 2009, p. 7). In general the concept of cooptation was used for the first time in literature by Cherington (Cherington, 1976).

Coopetition could be defined as simultaneous occurrence of competition and cooperation in the actions of competitors (Bengtsson, Kock, 2000, pp. 411-426). By its nature coopetition is a complex phenomenon which is related to coexisting trust and conflict between the entities (Cygler, 2013, p. 17). Trust is an element that supports joint action and is considered to be one of the four basic conditions for establishing cooperation. In the model created by C. Brito, S. Costa e Silva (Brito, Costa e Silva, 2009, pp. 289-299) there are presented four “C” conditions which are necessary for effective cooperation:

- Confidence,
- Common interests defined as areas of interest, mutual complementarity and compatibility,
- Conjoint resources,
- Coordination of activities demonstrated in their transfer and transformation.

Building trust is extremely important for the entities of the network enterprise. It prompts partners to solidarity and discourages from taking opportunistic actions (Cygler, 2013, p. 17). On the other hand conflict arises when activity takes competitive character and therefore enterprises function in the same market segments, offering similar products and services. This creates a divergence of interest which entails a possibility of opportunistic behavior occurrence and mutual reluctance (Bengtsson, Kock, 2000, pp. 411-426).

Coopetition is also defined as “the system of actors in interaction based on partial compliance of interests and goals” (Dagnino, Roy, Czakon, 2008, p. 3). This approach makes it possible to distinguish coopetition from cooperation and competition. It is important to highlight three elements (Dagnino, Roy, Czakon, 2008, p. 3):

- correlation between economic actors means both the source of value creation and also the place where this value is shared,
- the basis of interdependence between enterprises is a game with positive and variable sum that assumes mutual benefits for all actors, albeit the value of these benefits can be varied,
- in a game with positive and variable sum the correlation between organizations is based on partial overlapping of interests.

Simply put, coopetition constitutes relationships of cooperation and competition among enterprises. Types of these relationships between economic entities are presented in the table 1.

Table 1. Types of relationships between enterprises

Types of relationships	Cooperation	Competition	Coopetition
Frequency of relationships	big	big	big
Strenght of connections	significant	low	significant
Form of connections	formal or informal	formal	formal or informal
Trust level	high	low	medium
Resources owned	insufficient	sufficient	insufficient
Market position	weak	strong	strong

Source: (Cygler, 2007, p. 66; Skawińska, 2009, p. 172).

Insufficient resources are very often a prerequisite for concluding cooperative or cooperative relationships. It prompts business entities to establish formal or informal contacts. In the case of cooperation, level of trust must be high while coopetition allows medium level of trust between partners. Both in cooperation and in coopetition there is considerable strength of connections between economic units. Regardless of type of relationship (cooperation, competition or coopetition) there is high frequency of contacts among enterprises (Cygler, 2007, p. 66; Skawińska, 2009, p. 172).

Studies on coopetition allowed for interpretation cooperative relationships in the light of three theoretical concepts: game theory, transaction costs theory and resource concept. The first theoretical framework was proposed in the first half of 1990s by A.M. Brandenburger and B.J. Nalebuff. They appealed to game theory and used its achievement in the field of competition, cooperation and building cooperative relations. The basis for this study become classic analysis of prisoner’s dilemma which shows that thanks to cooperation the players are able to achieve the greatest overall benefits. Both researchers created also PARTS model as the starting point to identify and synthesize coopetition. The model consists of five elements: Players, Added values, Rules, Tactics and range Scope. This model complies with assumptions and conditions of game theory and says that entities compete with yourself while taking care of maximum benefits for themselves and relationships between players are non-zero-sum game (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996, pp. 5-7). The second theoretical concept that allows the analysis of coopetition is transaction costs theory. Occurrence of high transaction costs causes that enterprises are willing to cooperate and even coopete. However coopetition is not free from generating transaction costs, because the need to acquire specific assets, coordinating of activities, competitive character of partners, opportunistic behavior and limited rationality of proceedings involve such costs. To growth of transaction costs may also contribute complexity of cooperative relationships (Cygler, 2013, pp. 28-29). Important contribution to analysis of coopetition makes also resource concept which takes into account not only mutual transfer of

resources and their sourcing by interested parties, but also their joint efforts to generate these resources. The most valuable resources are usually owned by competitors, who, thanks to their use, have opportunity to obtain competitive advantage. In other words, among the competitors one can acquire valuable resources and competences, also taking into account that competitors face similar challenges (Gnyawali, Park, 2009, pp. 308-330). In addition, resource premises for taking up coepetition indicate not only acquisition of necessary complementary resources, but also restricting access to these resources for competitors (Czakon, 2014, p. 84).

Network coepetition

Network coepetition as one of levels of coepetitive relationship should be considered with special attention. In the “new economy” cooperation and competition take place at network level and hence it is necessary to analyze them on the same level (Krawiec, 2009, p. 75).

Cooperation is fundamental for arising, existing and functioning of network. Without cooperation a network enterprise would not be able to neither start a business nor develop. However in some areas of activity of network organization it is allowed or even recommended to compete. Nevertheless it cannot come to absolute competitive advantage between partners, because it could lead to destruction of trust or even collapse of whole network enterprise (Śliwiński, 2015, pp. 78-79).

The subject literature mentions various types of coepetitive relationships. Taking into account the main purpose of this article there is presented coepetition typology which shows subject and object approach. In the table 2 there are presented types of coepetition due to number of participants and scope of coepetitive relationships, since they are the basic issues of inter-organizational relations (Dagnino, Padula, 2002).

Table 2. Types of coepetition

		Number of participants	
		N = 2	N > 2
Level of value chain	N = 1	Simple dyadic coepetition	Simple network coepetition
	N > 1	Complex dyadic coepetition	Complex network coepetition

Source: (Dagnino, Padula, 2002, pp. 15, 30).

Network coepetition concerns structure of complex relationships between more than two entities which take place at the same time. Depending on the number of activities or projects in value chain there is recognized simple network coepetition which is characterized by single activity (e.g. relationship between supplier and customer which is known as parallel procurement). In case of many activities in value chain there arises complex network coepetition (e.g. industrial districts, clusters or multilateral agreements) (Dagnino, Padula, 2002, pp. 15-16).

Within simple network coepetition the participants could have two effects which constitute targets for them. One of them is called as synergistic effect and the second – creative effect. Synergistic effect occurs when there is complementarity of resources and competencies, resulting in surpassed value which is created jointly by individual offers of all entities. On the other hand the creative effect focuses on creation of new products or new services (Czakon, 2014, p. 79).

Network coepetition is also one type of coepetition in classification which takes into account number of involved competitors and geographic scope of relationship, beside concentrated coepetition, dispersed coepetition and geocentric coepetition (Luo, 2007, p. 139). Network coepetition is defined as the one which has the widest geographic scope and engaging the largest number of competitors. The basis of relationships between entities are: diversification of cooperators’ activities and heterogeneity of resources which they have. Complementary resource aspect prompts enterprises to form multilateral cooperative unions. Network coepetition is most noticeable in highly globalized sectors in which there occurs competition – oligopolistic in nature and capable of growing to rank of hiper-competition. This type of coepetition exists primarily all in high-tech sectors, such as: telecommunications, biotechnology, civil and military electronics (Luo, 2007, pp. 141-142; Cygler, 2009, p. 30).

Coepetition is very important in creating and functioning network enterprises. It could be defined as a system in which all partners maintain certain level of interdependence, keeping their organizational autonomy at the same time. It applies also in international relationships (Luo, 2004, p. 169). Coepetition increases power of innovation and performance of network members. What is more, the most closely associated network participants are most capable of influencing network without losing their high degree of autonomy. Research showed that enterprises with advantageous network positions (it means with great number of connections, which are very central, have unnecessary ties and are thus highly structurally autonomous) achieve many benefits from their coepetitive network and turn out to be more competitively aggressive. In other words, various access to

network resources directs to resource asymmetries between entities and consequently to differences in competitive behavior (Gnyawali et al., 2006, pp. 508-509).

Network competition in football clubs

Football clubs produces an indivisible product which results from autonomous processes of two or more companies (in law). The product is divisible into parts and these parts can be and are sold independently. Nevertheless it is also still joint and multiple yet indivisible product. The product of professional football clubs is not only match, but also championship (or “league standings”) – progress in the direction to championship or changes in the standings. Additionally football clubs cannot produce any of these utilities or streams individually. It’s very important to underline that cooperating entities in sport are not willing buyers and sellers from and to each other but together sell to third parties (Neale, 1964, pp. 2-4).

In economics the enterprise is also defined as “decision-making” unit with major objective as profit. It must be highlighted that there is the same “decision-making” unit and “profit taking” unit, while in professional football clubs the legal enterprise takes profit and the league makes decisions. In network football clubs the partners are legally separate, but when they reach joint decisions on marketing and pricing, are treated as merged. Thanks to network the football clubs are able to produce championship product. It requires also including leagues to the analysis which are or should be competing entities (Neale, 1964, pp. 5-6). Competitors are encouraged to expand and sustain collaborative agreements not only in connection of organizing better matches but also looking into new sources of income and sharing ideas regarding best practices (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 6).

In sport industry competition should be investigated from two points of view - sporting and economic (Neale, 1964, pp. 1-14). During matches the football clubs compete between each other because they want to achieve the best possible result. In turn, in the case of economic competition individual club cannot satisfy the whole market demand, so the football “product” created by the clubs competes with any other product in entertainment area (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 9-10).

In football clubs there is also strictly visible cooperation. In such group activity as football, there are several players who need to fulfill certain goal. Each group participant has his/her own scope of duties, but he/she also performs dependent role - must have in mind that there is a wider goal to be reached. So the actions performed by players should take into consideration different functions which are assigned to them as the members of the group (Reineke et al., 2020, p. 3071).

There are no doubts that cooperation entails many benefits among business. In general it is treated as a chance for costs reduction, sharing unique resources and improving competitive position. Sport market works in similar way, since sports organizations, including football clubs, compete and cooperate with each other at the same time. Both cooperation and competition take place on two levels. They are called as precisely sports-related level and market-related level. The first one concerns for example collision of two teams and fight for victory. The second one is related to competing for clients, sponsors and contribution in media entertainment (Wąskowski, 2017, p. 13).

Professional football clubs compete each other within an organized league and, what is more, the organizers of league sports events perceive potential in cooperation (Watt, 2003, pp. 133-136). Consequently professional football is a sector where cooperation is noticeable and plays very important role. Victory in the European Champions League is beneficial not only for the winning football club, but also for all clubs in the same national league. Thanks to this result nation’s ranking increases and it involves that more clubs can participate the European championship next year (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 6).

Professional sport is connected with various cooperation strategies and associated benefits. The general characteristics and structure of cooperation in football clubs is presented in the figure 1.

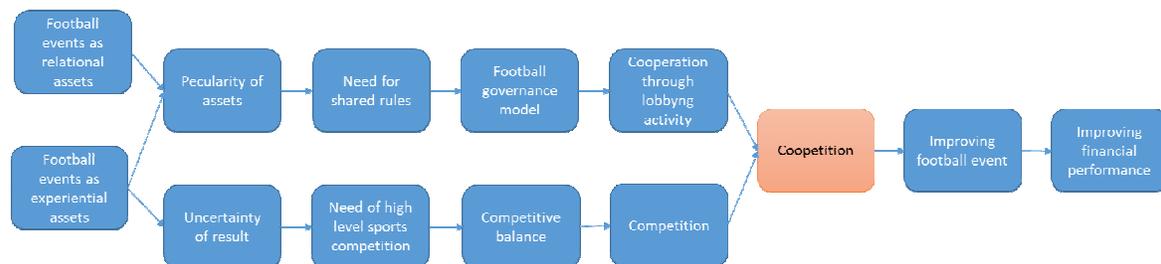


Fig. 1. Cooperation model specifics in professional football

Source: (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 12).

Football is a multifaceted game in which there exist: strong competitive element (the most talented club wins) and fortune element (an aspect which can overturn any prediction). In general sports entertainment is an

experiential resource specified by uncertainty and for that reason optimal sports experience is relied on presumption of competitive balance. Football is also relational asset in which role and inherent value of interpersonal relationships are the most important aspects. Therefore it can be stated that the football entertainment constitutes really complex resource which cannot be located within one conceptual framework. These features and agreed rules between football clubs are fertile ground for cooperation. It is connected with the fact that all clubs want to make football entertainment more fascinating in comparison to competitive products (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 11).

In order to allow cooperation between football clubs, there should be set some rules by an organization outside the clubs. These rules are shared between all participants. It is quite obvious that larger clubs have bigger power for defining the rules through lobbying proposals and appointing their own representatives to the most important governing bodies. What is more, football clubs are straightly involved in election process for organizations governing national federations and then the latter are active electorate for governance entities of international federations. To sum up, football is hybrid system in which football clubs indirectly define the rules, wherein they are directly or indirectly involved in the group which actively vote in and for national and international federal governance bodies (Lardo et al., 2016, p. 11-12).

Discussion

The foregoing discussion has tried to justify and demonstrate the importance of cooperation in functioning of network football clubs. By analyzing the cooperation which occurs in network football clubs, there was made an attempt to answer specific research questions:

- What are the main reasons of undertaking cooperation by network football clubs?
- How is cooperation regulated in network football clubs?

The studies which have been conducted for the analysis allowed to conclude that in the professional football sector exist relational and experiential assets. They have significant role of being fundamental conditions for establishing systems of cooperation and competition which leads to cooperation occurrence between the football clubs which want to achieve competitive advantage. As a consequence the model of cooperation is applied to the management of football competitions. The main goal is to fulfil demand and spectators' expectations – it means providing exciting and unpredictable sport entertainment. It is possible when football clubs, thanks to cooperation, improve football events and accordingly improve their financial performance.

Taking into account the above aspects, the main purposes of simultaneously cooperation and competition within professional football clubs apply to improving football events and also improving financial performance. It is possible to reach when the members of network football clubs trust each other, there are meaningful connections between them and they create common value. Since single entities can have insufficient resources, they cooperate to get access to the missing ones. Thanks to it they are able to build strong market position.

Connections between partners in competition are formal or informal. Even though that they trust each other, they need clear rules for common functioning. For professional football clubs the rules are created by external organization and are shared between all members. In cooperation it is very important to follow these rules.

Conclusions

In this paper the author dealt with cooperation in network football clubs. Cooperation is a fundamental aspect in creating and functioning of network enterprises, such as network football clubs. It is strictly connected with two processes: value creation and value appropriation. Typical cooperation factors as involvement, strategic matching, interdependence, autonomy, relationships institutionalization, integration and indivisibility have tremendous impact on the success of the network. The findings in this study indicated that cooperation is beneficial not only for the whole network, but also for single clubs. Involved parties are interested in better performance, especially in improving football events and raising financial results. To achieve these goals, they agree to abide by established rules. After the whole analysis from this paper it is hard to escape the key conclusion that cooperation plays very important role in functioning of network football clubs, allowing achievement of better results.

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