



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

Understanding and Managing Coopetition for Sustainability: Process and Outcomes

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för
avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt
försvar i Hörsal UB.A.210, Lindellhallen 1 (S Hörsal A),
fredagen den 10 december, kl. 11:00.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

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Delaware, USA

Organization

Umeå University
Umeå School of Business,
Economics and Statistics

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

19 November 2021

Author

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Title

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Abstract

Scholars highlight the potential gains of collaboration between competitors for supporting sustainability but there is a lack of both theoretical and empirical studies. In this thesis I aim to enhance the understanding of ‘coopetition for sustainability’, which I define as ‘*an inter-firm phenomenon where actors from the same industry simultaneously cooperate and compete with the intent to achieve environmental, economic, and social benefits*’. By investigating the process and outcomes of coopetition for sustainability I develop several analytical tools for the systematic exploration of the cooperative interaction for reaching sustainability goals and show that coopetition for sustainability raises numerous knotted paradoxical tensions. I further reveal organizing and regulating mechanisms that actors use to address these tensions, and which can motivate greater extents of sustainability in terms of outcomes.

This thesis consists of six appended papers (two conceptual, two qualitative, and two quantitative) that explore coopetition for sustainability in three contextual settings (Swedish, Polish, and Belarusian housing). Collectively, the papers span several theoretical frameworks (paradox theory, sustainable value, modern portfolio theory) and methodological approaches (system dynamics, in-depth case study, survey questionnaires). Overall, my explorations in this thesis show that whilst coopetition for sustainability is a complex, tension-filled phenomenon, it has great potential to advance sustainability in both theory and practice. I contribute to theory by generating novel insights into: (i) The process of coopetition for sustainability showing how actors organize collaboration for sustainability and how they respond to paradoxical tensions they frequently experience; (ii) The outcomes of coopetition for sustainability, which I systematically conceptualize and model. I also offer several implications for practice that can help managers to navigate the process of coopetition for sustainability in order to enhance economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Keywords

coopetition for sustainability, paradox, tension, outcome, process, knotted paradox, organizing mechanism, system dynamics, sustainable value, portfolio theory

Language

English

ISBN

978-91-7855-680-9 (print)
978-91-7855-681-6 (PDF)

ISSN

0346-8291

Number of pages

88 + 6 papers