

## **Coopetition from Beginning to End: An Analysis of the Cooperation Process between Competitors**

## **Coopetição do Começo ao Fim: Uma Análise do Processo de Cooperação entre Concorrentes**

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**Abstract:** This research aims to analyze, from beginning to end, the process of interorganizational coopetition, seeking to understand the temporal patterns of cooperative relationships by exploring their antecedents, processes and results, which in this research are understood as: the moment before interorganizational coopetition (pre-coopetition), the moment when interorganizational coopetition is in progress (coopetition) and the moment after the end of the cooperative relationship between competitors (post coopetition). For this, a case study was developed, using a qualitative approach. The case was defined from the identification of competitive and cooperative elements in the relationship between two Brazilian non-profit organizations, one of which is governmental and the other sectoral. Data were collected from January 2018 to February 2020 and analyzed through narrative analysis and pattern matching, using the MAXQDA 2020 software. The study from the beginning to the end of the cooperative relationship allowed to contribute to the literature, identify different elements of cooperation and competition in the moment before and after the cooperative relationship. Unlike the pre-cooperative moment, which presented some elements of cooperation, in the post-coopetition moment a strategy of pure competition between organizations was identified.

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**Keywords** – Interorganizational Coopetition; Coopetitive Process; Cooperation; Competition.

**Resumo:** A presente pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar, do começo ao fim, o processo da coopetição interorganizacional, buscando compreender os padrões temporais das relações coopetitivas explorando seus antecedentes, processos e resultados, que nesta pesquisa são entendidos como: o momento anterior a coopetição interorganizacional (pré-coopetitivo), o momento em que a coopetição interorganizacional está em andamento (coopetitivo) e o momento após o término da relação coopetitiva entre os concorrentes (pós-coopetitivo). Para isso, foi desenvolvido um estudo de caso, analisado por meio de abordagem qualitativa. O caso foi definido a partir da identificação de elementos competitivos e cooperativos na relação entre duas organizações brasileiras sem fins lucrativos, sendo uma delas governamental e outra setorial. Os dados foram coletados no período de janeiro de 2018 a fevereiro de 2020 e analisados por meio da análise da narrativa e *pattern matching*, com o uso do *software* MAXQDA 2020. O estudo do começo ao término da relação coopetitiva permitiu contribuir com a literatura, ao identificar diferentes elementos de cooperação e competição no momento anterior e posterior a relação coopetitiva. Diferente do momento pré-coopetitivo, que apresentou alguns elementos de cooperação, no momento pós-coopetição foi identificada uma estratégia de competição pura entre as organizações.

**Palavras-chave** – Coopetição Interorganizacional; Processo Coopetitivo; Cooperação; Competição.

### **Introduction**

The simultaneous occurrence of cooperation and competition is called in the literature as coopetition. This type of relationship allows companies to continue in their competitive positions, seeking to maximize their results and becoming leaders in a given market, while accessing opportunities to create value through cooperation (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Robert et al., 2009). Because of this characteristic, coopetition has shown positive results in corporate profits (Hannachi & Coléno, 2015; Rusko, 2011), knowledge sharing (Tsai, 2002), reduction of uncertainties (Luo, 2007), organizational learning (Demirel, 2013) and technologies and innovation (Bouncken & Fredrich, 2012; Brolos, 2009; Ritala, 2012; Strese, Meuer, Flatten, & Brettel, 2016).

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Most research on the subject has employed transversal techniques and explored elements that precede (Bouncken & Fredrich, 2012; Chin, Chan, & Lam, 2008; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009) or result from coopetition (Bouncken & Fredrich, 2012; Brolos, 2009; Demirel, 2013; Hannachi & Coléno, 2015; Luo, 2007; Ritala, 2012; Rusko, 2011; Strese et al., 2016; Tsai, 2002). However, since the 1990s, authors such as Loebbecke, Van Fenema and Powell (1999), have suggested that researchers investigate the integral process of the coopetitive relationship and the specific configurations of this relationship, considering the different times of coopetition.

In this sense, this research aims to analyze, from beginning to end, the process of interorganizational coopetition seeking to understand the temporal patterns of coopetitive relationships, exploring their antecedents, processes and results, which in this study are understood as: the moment before the interorganizational coopetition (pre-coopetitive), the moment when the interorganizational coopetition is in progress (coopetitive) and the moment after the end of the coopetitive relationship between competitors (post-coopetitive). For this, the study uses elements from the Resource Based View, which seeks to highlight the benefits of combining resources made possible through coopetition for the results of organizations (Estrada, Faems, & De Faria, 2016).

The case study was developed with two Brazilian organizations, one governmental and the other sectoral, which worked together for about five years. Until 2014 the two organizations were competing for investment promotion projects. It is worth mentioning that unlike private organizations which dispute the market with their competitors with the ultimate goal of obtaining greater financial results, the selected organizations, in addition to the concern related to the transfer of resources for the maintenance of their activities, competed for the status related to merit the announcement of new investments, which revert to society in the form of employment and regional development. In other words, beyond the financial issue, there was a power struggle between the institutions.

This study contributes to the coopetition literature by studying organizations that compete essentially for power (and not for financial results, as in most studies on this topic) and to analyze the integral process of the coopetitive relationship, which allows comparing the elements of competition and cooperation before and after coopetitive relations. In managerial aspects, these findings tend to contribute to the development of strategies by organizations that are beginning to build a coopetitive

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relationship, in order to highlight the progress and the different configurations of the partnership over time, as well as reinforcing the relevance of tools of control for the appropriation of value, and maintenance of the knowledge acquired during the coopetition, after finished.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **Coopetition**

In the competitive paradigm, organizations aim to outperform other market participants to maximize their own interests (Porter, 1990; Bengtsson and Kock 2000), while in the cooperative paradigm, they are based on the common goals they have with other organizations to collaborate in the development of actions instead of carrying them out individually (Padula & Dagnino, 2007). Although both concepts have power in describing relations between companies, they do not explain all relations between firms (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Padula & Dagnino 2007). To explain the scenario in which competing organizations cooperate for a common goal, the literature has used the concept of coopetition (Kraus, Meier, Niemand, Bouncken, & Ritala, 2018).

Coopetition has been approached from different perspectives. When carrying out a systematic review of 142 articles, Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) identified two schools of thought of coopetition: the Actor's School of Thought and the Activity Thinking School – previously addressed by Rusko et al. (2014) as contextual and procedural approaches, respectively. From the integration of the two Schools of Thought Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) suggested a third approach, which they called the School of Mixed Thinking, which, will not be explored in this study.

At the Actor's School of Thought, coopetition is defined in a broad sense, as a context. Cooperation and competition are divided between actors – that's why it's called the Actor's School of Thought. The main underlying concept of this school is the “value network”, derived from the seminal work of Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996). In this perspective, companies operate in an environment made up of four main groups that influence business conduct: suppliers, customers, competitors and complementary organizations (Dagnino et al., 2007; Vitorino Filho et al., 2013). The novelty of this model refers mainly to complementers, which refer to organizations capable of making another more attractive.

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Game theory is often used as a tool to analyze how interactions between these actors, the choices they make and the interaction between cooperation and competition lead to different results (Pathak, Wu, & Johnston, 2014; Stamboulis, 2007). Studies using this approach do not normally take the perspective of a focal company. The criticism of the Actor's School of Thought refers to the breadth of the studied context, which does not allow the study of the specificities and the complex nature of coopetitive relations.

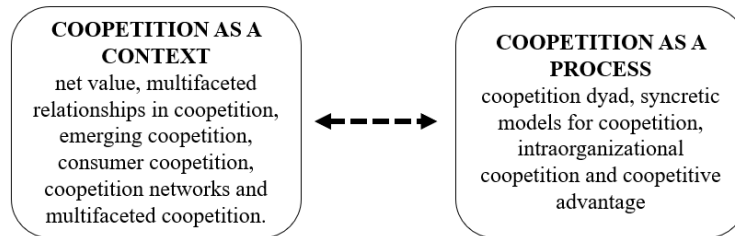
To eliminate the limitations of the Actor's School of Thought, Bengtsson and Kock (2000) proposed a distinct approach, classified by Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) as the School of Activity Thinking, which focuses on coopetitive relationships rather than context network. In this situation, coopetition represents organizational behavior which is cooperative and competitive among companies that offer the same type of product or service for the same consumer segment (Pellegrin-Boucher, Le Roy, & Gurău, 2013). It is observed in this way, that the concept of Bengtsson and Kock (1999) is concentrated in one of the dimensions presented by Brandenburgher and Nalebuff (1996): the competitors. In addition, Bengtsson and Kock (2000) claim that in coopetitive relations the cooperation occurs in different areas where competition happens.

Therefore, the different definitions attributed to coopetition initially by Brandenburgher and Nalebuff (1996) and Bengtsson and Kock (1999) resulted, therefore, in different schools of thought. Briefly, when analyzed from the perspective of the company's value chain (macro or meso organizational level) based on the concept of coopetition introduced by Brandenburgher and Nalebuff (1996), coopetition is analyzed as context (Monticelli et al., 2018; Rusko, 2012) from the Actor's School of Thought approach (Bengtsson & Raza Ullah, 2016).

On the other hand, when analyzing coopetition in the conceptual perspective of Bengtsson and Kock (1999, 2014), which understands coopetition as strategies of cooperation and competition simultaneously between competing companies (micro or meso organizational level), it is said that coopetition is analyzed from a process perspective (Monticelli et al., 2018; Rusko, 2012) and from the School of Activity Thinking (Bengtsson et al., 2016). The main discussions within each of these perspectives are presented in Figure 1.

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**Figure 1.** Discussion groups on coopetition  
Source: Adapted from Rusko (2014, p.806).

In both schools, coopetition is understood as dynamic, complex and managerially challenging (Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah, 2016). The nature of these dimensions, however, is different in each school. Given the focus of this research, in the process of cooperative relationship between two competing organizations, the School of Activity Thinking approach was adopted. Thus, the nature of the dimensions will be better explored considering this perspective.

According to Bengtsson and Raza-Ullah (2016) it is common for the dynamic nature of the process to be described as the interaction of cooperative and competitive activities between companies. In this context, cooperation and competition do not cancel each other out; instead, they oscillate on a continuum so that cooperation stimulates competition, competition gives rise to cooperation and coopetition is somewhere in the middle of this continuum (Luo, 2007; Gnyawali & Park, 2011). Competition is usually observed in activities close to customers, while cooperative activities are carried out away from customers (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

The complex nature of the cooperative relationship is related to the simultaneous contradictory demands and resulting tensions (Bengtsson et al., 2016). This is because in a cooperative process there are cooperative and competitive interests occurring simultaneously (Le Roy & Fernandez, 2015) which results in the need to share and protect knowledge, working to generate private and common benefits for organizations. This ends up generating constant tensions (Sanou, Le Roy, & Gnyawali, 2016), mainly at the individual level (emotional ambivalence), which tend to impact the collective and organizational level (Raza-Ullah et al., 2014).

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The management of contradictory elements and tensions arising from coopetition emerges, therefore, as a challenging dimension (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Bengtsson; Raza-Ullah, & Vanyushyn, 2016; Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Fernandez, Le Roy, & Gnyawali, 2014; Le Roy & Fernandez, 2015; Ritala & Tidström, 2014). In this sense, organizations that develop strategies to deal with the paradox of coopetition tend to achieve better results. The literature cites three different approaches to such management. The first (separation principle or structural strategy) argues that individuals cannot internalize the duality of coopetition, and companies must create an organizational separation between activities dedicated to competition and cooperation (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). The second (integration principle or strategy) recommends that managers integrate and balance individually the paradox of coopetition (Fernandez et al., 2014; Pellegrin-Boucher, Le Roy, & Gurău, 2013). Finally, the third party mediation strategy is suggested as a way of managing paradoxical tensions, controlling conflicts between coopetitive companies and defining how to cooperate and compete (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

The paradoxical nature of coopetition therefore requires companies to assume a dynamic combination, with the aim of balancing the relationship, of competition and cooperation, according to the environment and time in which they operate (Monticelli et al., 2018). This combination tends to be complex, since it often results in contradictory demands and competitive tensions, which must be properly managed so that the coopetition reaches the results desired by the organizations involved.

Regarding the motivators (background or motivators for the coopetitive relationship to continue to happen), and results of coopetition, Bengtsson et al., (2016) state that previous studies, regardless of the School of Thought, seem to have identified similar items.

The studies found that the motivators can be external, such as industrial characteristics, technological demands and influences of external stakeholders, internal as resources, capacities, or specific knowledge that allow the company to increase its competitiveness in the market, or even by specific drivers for this relationship that concern the partner and the characteristics of the relationship that facilitate coopetitive training, that is, that the partner company has a profile of distinct and complementary resources in addition to congruent goals. The results are concentrated in the areas of innovation, knowledge, organizational performance and organizational / interorganizational relationship.

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Finally, it is worth highlighting some specific elements related to the characteristics of the case studied which, differently from research traditionally applied to for profit companies – in the majority of R&D and technology companies, applies to a sectoral and a governmental organization. These organizations bring with them elements that cannot be ignored in the study of coopetition, such as power and political changes. As few coopetition researches have been developed outside private organizations, the influence of these elements in this process has been little explored. Luo (2004) sought to analyze the coopetition between multinational corporations (MNCs) and host governments and from that analysis found that political instability caused, for example, by the change of the ruling party, negatively influences long-term projects. Therefore, cooperation on projects like this tends to be greater and competition less when the political environment is more stabilized.

With regard to power, the study by Luo (2004) highlights the relevance of interdependence for bargaining power in negotiations between multinational companies and the government. In the present study, however, power is understood as the final result expected by organizations for the development of actions to promote investments, as a type of authority legitimized by society (Weber, 2003), based on the theory of bureaucracy that believes that power is attributed to organizations due to certain characteristics, such as credibility and prestige (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

### **Research Method**

The coopetition process was analyzed in this research from a qualitative approach, based on an explanatory case study, defended by Yin (2018) as the appropriate method for understanding complex and little explored phenomena. The selected case was a cooperation project, which was officially in force from 2014 to 2019, between a public organization (government of a Brazilian state) and a sectorial organization (of the same state), for the structuring of an investment promotion agency. Until 2014 the two organizations, which formed the agency, had internally areas designed to promote investments for the territory in which they operate competing for projects that arrived in the state. As already noted, far beyond the financial issue, there was a power struggle between the institutions.

For this project to be properly structured, it was necessary, therefore, to bring together the areas of both organizations, which developed activities related to investment promotion, and to define teams



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to act at different levels of activities. Two levels were structured, based on strategic planning and effectively constituted in practice: (i) the Deliberative Council, represented by the strategic level of the organizations, composed by the president of Beta and by four state managers (Alfa), whose function was to represent the interests of the agency's stakeholders; and (ii) the Technical Committee, composed of three representatives of the tactical / operational level of Beta and three participants from each of the state secretariats represented in the Deliberative Council, responsible for supporting the strategic, tactical and operational actions of the project.

In order to understand the studied phenomenon, triangulate the data obtained and ensure a better basis for the results of the study, participant observations, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were used in the data collection of this research. Data collection was carried out from January 2018 to February 2020. The contact was initially made with the Beta organization, which inserted the researcher as a member of the Technical Committee, enabling the monitoring of the agency's activities and participant observation.

The observations were made, fundamentally, during the meetings with members of the Technical Committee and Deliberative Council, although some of them were made outside this context. In total, the researcher followed two meetings with members of the Deliberative Council and 69 meetings with members of the Technical Committee, with 41 meetings referring to the weekly meeting of the team, which were approximately 2 hours long and 28 of them related to the Committee meeting with investors. In addition, observations were made during the participation of six members of the current Committee on investment promotion and during two congresses in which the team had exhibition stands.

The interviews were conducted in the months of November and December 2019, with 20 people, 7 of whom were linked to a sectorial entity and 11 of them to the government. Two interviews were conducted with third parties (consultants) hired at different stages of the project. The duration of each interview, the department and the level of performance of each of the interviewees are described in Table 1. We emphasize that all the names of the interviewees and the areas, as well as the names mentioned in the interviews were changed in order to maintain the confidentiality of the research subjects.

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**Table 1.**  
Interview data.

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Activity Level</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Interviewee A	Strategic	Beta 1 and 2	44:41
Interviewee B	Tactical	Beta 1	37:09
Interviewee C	Tactical	Beta 2	35:08
Interviewee D	Tactical / Operational	Beta 2	1:26:41
Interviewee E	Operational	Beta 2	12:16
Interviewee F	Operational	Beta 2	43:03
Interviewee G	Operational	Beta 2	41:23
Interviewee H	Strategic	Alfa 1	31:58
Interviewee I	Strategic	Alfa 2	43:09
Interviewee J	Strategic / Tactical	Alfa 3	1:12:03
Interviewee K	Tactical	Alfa 1	49:16
Interviewee L	Operational	Alfa 1	26:58
Interviewee M	Operational	Alfa 1	13:45
Interviewee N	Tactical	Alfa 2 / Alfa 3	54:21
Interviewee O	Tactical	Alfa 3	1:04:40
Interviewee P	Tactical	Alfa 4	44:24
Interviewee Q	Tactical	Alfa 4	30:28
Interviewee R	Operational	Alfa 2	53:27
Interviewee S	-	Consultant A	36:38
Interviewee T	-	Consultant B	1:56:35

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Regarding the analysis of documents, the cooperation agreement signed between the institutions, the website and social media of the project, the document with the strategies developed for the action of the teams and the final report of accountability, were used as basis. The documents were made available by the institutions for analysis during the entire data collection period for the research.

As support for the stage of organization, categorization and interpretation of data obtained from companies, we used the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, version 2020. For data interpretation we applied the Narrative (Godoi, Bandeira-De-Melo, & Silva, 2006) and the Pattern Matching techniques of data analysis (Trochim, 1989). While the narrative analysis allowed the interpretation of the interviews in depth, the Pattern Matching technique enabled the comparison between the existing theory and the data collected in the empirical phase.

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## **Analysis and Discussion of Results**

### **Analysis of Results**

Three different analysis periods were defined for this study: (i) the pre-coopetition phase or Time 0 (T0), which started negotiations between organizations and areas for the beginning of the interorganizational relationship of coopetition and development of the strategic planning of actions (2011 to 2015); (ii) the coopetition phase or Time 1 (T1), when joint activities were effectively started (2015 to 2018/2019); and (iii) the post-coopetition phase or Time 2 (T2), which refers to the period after the end of the interorganizational coopetition (in the perception of the interviewees).

It should be noted that the occurrence of different periods or phases of the coopetition project was also clear to the study participants. Interviewees D and N, established at the beginning of their speeches three distinct periods observed in the project, while Interviewee O used the terms “pre agency period”, “agency period” and “currently” to define the different phases evidenced.

The end of coopetition (post-coopetition) would initially be considered as mid-2019, when the meeting took place where the end of cooperation between organizations in this project was officially announced. For the interviewees, however, the project ended before this date, since in practice the cooperation between organizations ended months before the official meeting. Most of the interviewees (of the Technical Committee) even informed that they are not aware that the end of the cooperation between the organizations had been made official. Thus, the author chose not to define the meeting as the starting point of the post-coopetitive period, thus allowing the interviewees to establish the phase change (coopetitive to post-coopetitive) according to their perceptions about the level of cooperation between organizations. Further details on each phase are presented below.

#### **Pre-coopetition Phase (T0)**

The pre-coopetition phase refers to the period of approximation of the organizations and the first initiatives for the development of the coopetitive action project to promote investments, that is, the

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planning and structuring of the agency. In the pre-coopetition phase, some factors stand out in the interviewees' speech: the need for joint work to attract a large investment (Omega); the start of negotiations for cooperation between Alfa and Beta for the structuring of an investment promotion agency; the alteration of the strategic level team in Alfa (elections); and, the formulation of the agency's strategic planning.

Alfa and Beta have in their scope the promotion of investments, in order to promote the increase of collection for both, and also a greater economic and social development for the society in general, through the generation of employment and income for the population. The benefits arising from the investments end up attributing prestige to the person responsible for attracting the projects. Alpha and Beta initially vied for protagonism. Although, according to the report of Interviewees N and O, the organizations had a good level of interaction and engagement.

When presenting an investment project that surpassed the mark of 1 billion reais, with a forecast of generating 2,000 job vacancies, however, which contemplated, among others, the need to negotiate “tax incentives, issues related to environment, personnel training and financing for opening the factory” (Interviewee N), all organizations that could add value to the investment attraction process were invited by Alfa to contribute to the negotiation, including Beta. According to Interviewee R, Alfa increased its interactions with Beta in this period to access data requested by the investing company, in this study called Omega. In addition, Alpha stimulated the interaction between Omega and Beta, in order to highlight the support and security provided by the sectoral organization.

The results of the negotiation with Omega were positive, leading the Alfa 1 manager to start a project for the development of joint actions between organizations to attract innovative investments to the state. However, according to Interviewees A and K, this project did not deliver the expected results. These events took place between 2011 and 2014.

At the same time, Beta was structuring a development plan with the companies in the sector it represents and identified that one of the biggest needs in the sector was the densification of the production chain, that is, the attraction of investments that would meet the need to import or purchase products of other states, which would directly impact their costs. In view of the companies' need and the

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benefits perceived from the joint work to attract Omega, Beta took to Alfa, in 2014, a proposal for the structuring of a partnership for the creation of an investment promotion agency.

Although the project presented by Beta received support from the Alfa 1 manager, Alfa's administrative leadership did not fully agree with the joint work of the organizations. According to Interviewee O, this was because Beta often developed actions and announced as policies that should have been developed by Alpha, and as they were not, the Beta organization took responsibility and executed. Such behavior meant that the leader of Alpha had his administration pointed out as inefficient, what made him resistant to the idea of cooperating with the Beta organization on this project. In the words of Interviewee O, the administrative leader “believed that [Beta] would say that [Alpha] had delegated the activity of attracting investments to her” (Interviewee O), highlighting the institutions' power struggle over the attraction of investments in the state.

In order to continue the partnership, Alfa 1 and the strategic level of Beta, sought the support of other Alfa departments, which also developed activities related to investment promotion and had participated in the negotiation with Omega. In order to support the project, Alfa 2, Alfa 3 and Alfa 4, committed themselves to Alfa 1 and Beta, to make their team members available for the initial discussions on the formatting of the agency. During this period, Alfa 1 reported directly to the administrative leader the progress of the negotiations on the partnership.

It should be noted that the year 2014, when the agency's project began to be considered by Alfa and Beta, was a year of state elections and, although the administrative leadership was re-elected, there was an exchange of managers from Alfa 1, 2, 3 and 4, involved in the structuring project of the investment promotion agency. At this stage, however, the project was already aware of the tactical and operational level, which defended its maintenance with the new managers. The relevance of this work by the technical staff of the secretariats was highlighted in the statements of Interviewees J, K, N, O and P.

Each tactical member of the agency ended up moving to the “upstairs” the needs and benefits of this agency [...], it took, if I'm not mistaken, almost a year. From this acting vacuum, until we start to resume the agency's meetings in a more structured way, presenting the planning that was done to the new actors, to the new sponsors (Interviewee P).

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After getting to know the project and meeting with Beta, the new managers chose to continue the cooperative activities, enabling the continuity of the project. According to Interviewee I, the manager who took over Alpha 2 after the elections, there was some competition between his area in Alpha and area with similar competence in Beta (Beta 2), however, it was decided to build a partnership relationship with Beta, reducing the competitive elements. Respondents from the Alpha 1, Alpha 3 and Alpha 4 areas did not highlight elements of competition between their areas or managers and Beta.

Beta's strategic manager, Interviewee A, stated that the continuity of the project was a joint conviction of Beta with Alpha 1, Alpha 2, Alpha 3 and Alpha 4, according to him "if there was resistance from any of the areas of [Alpha ] the leader of the organization would not buy the idea ". Interviewee A's speech demonstrates the support received from the managers of the four Alpha areas for the continuity of the cooperation project between the organizations, as well as confirms the resistance of the Alfa administrative leader regarding the partnership. Interviewee L stated that Beta worked skillfully to eliminate the view of rivalry that existed between the new managers (and their areas), leading them to see the partnership for the construction of the investment promotion agency as a joint project of the new management.

After the investment promotion agency's project was approved, through cooperation between the institutions, a specialized consultancy was hired to formulate the strategic planning together with the Alpha and Beta teams. According to the consultant, Interviewee S, the areas of organizations had never discussed. The result was that each one saw himself in a piece of the process, it was possible to identify the gray areas, where there were conflicts, which were resolved, and each one could see that all the areas involved, from both organizations, were of value to the investor, took care of part of the process and had strengths that others did not have. In the end, according to him, it was possible to create respect and trust between the areas of the organizations.

For Interviewee A, the formulation of strategic planning can be considered as a facilitator for the following activities, because everyone was involved and committed to the project from the beginning, so they felt they were part of the process. It should be noted, however, that the administrative leader did not attend any of the project meetings, not even at the strategic level meetings that were held by the consultancy in order to commit the parties to the developed planning (Interviewee S). An analysis of the

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documents, such as attendance lists and photos, of the four events promoted by the agency also highlights the absence of the manager.

### **Coopetition Phase (T1)**

The second phase, or coopetition phase, comprises the period in which the agency started to operate in practical terms, that is, the group was formalized and the organizations started to develop joint activities for the promotion of investments. This phase can be subdivided into three distinct moments, the initial moment when the technical team developed the tactical and operational activities, an intermediate moment, when a specialized consultant was hired to perform the operational activities and a third period, when the technical team returns to assume both levels of activities.

In 2015, the agency's activities began to be effectively developed. In an informal way, invitations to meetings with investors began to emerge from the different areas of the organizations (Interviewee J). For Interviewee N, the participation of several actors in these meetings unified the discourse regarding investment promotion, and started to demonstrate to investors the agency's efficiency and effectiveness.

According to Interviewee G, in addition to the meetings with investors, there were weekly meetings with the team of the two organizations, where information on the progress of investment projects coordinated by each area was passed on. Interviewee G also stated that, although the performance model was better than the promotion of individual investments, the team did not see the model as ideal, since “at the same time that everyone was responsible, nobody was responsible. There was no leadership to coordinate the project”. For this reason, it was decided to hire a consultant who would act as an agency coordinator. The hiring of this professional was already foreseen in the initial agreement between the institutions and in the strategic planning itself, but at the request of the Deliberative Council, the technical team initially tried to develop the activities without hiring this professional. In April 2016 the consultant was hired.

The expected profile of this professional was technical, with knowledge about attracting investments, being able to organize the team (Interviewees A, I and N). Thus, a professional with market experience was hired from the private sector. The professional's lack of experience in the public area and

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with political elements ended up hampering the professional's actions (Interviewees O and T). These difficulties were perceived by both the consultant and by Alpha and Beta. In June 2017 the contract with the consultant was finalized and the agency returned to work without the presence of a coordinator of the agency's activities, returning to the same model as 2015, with the development of the actions under responsibility of the Technical Committee and decision-making centered on the Deliberative Council. However, it is noteworthy that unlike 2015 organizations agree that this work model operated better without the presence of a coordinator.

Even with the departure of the external professional hired to coordinate the agency's activities the dialogue between Alpha and Beta remained good (Interviewee J) and there was an increase in trust between organizations, especially at the technical level (Interviewees A and B). Alpha and Beta started to work more cooperatively, as they understood that. Although the figure of the coordinator was important in the sense of passing on the demands of investors, these were always carried out by the technical team (Interviewees O and R). In this sense, the technical team would continue to develop, basically, the same activities. Each area assumed responsibility for monitoring some active investment projects. Beta made available a Beta 1 individual to coordinate the team's agenda and distribute activities among each of the areas involved (Interviewee D).

It should be noted that, although the agency coordinator represents a relevant actor in this period, some other elements marked the cooperative relationship between organizations and for this reason they will be better explored in this topic: the competition for the announcement of investments; the reduction in the priority of the agency's project between the strategic level; and the partial dedication of the team of both organizations to the agency's activities.

Although at the technical level, strategic planning has promoted the necessary integration between the Alpha and Beta teams to work together and initiate cooperation activities in T1, at the strategic level there have been several competitive conflicts between organizations, especially concerning the disclosure of investment projects. In the search for self-promotion, each organization tried to receive credits for attracting investments (Interviewees G and T). According to Interviewee D, in some cases, projects were announced before the proposal was closed, and even with the signature of a confidentiality agreement between the company and the technical group.



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Even though we had an agreement in the Technical Committee, even though we had agreed on how to make the disclosure, even though we really had good intentions, when we communicated to each superior, to each manager, or to the Beta president, even asking that we still were not disclosed, sometimes they ended up divulging. So, this created a problem of confidence at the technical level. [...] in the face of this type of event, the Technical Committee itself no longer shared some data at the strategic level (Interviewee D).

As can be seen in the speech of Interviewee D, the competitive conflicts between the strategic level of the organizations ended up affecting the position of the Technical Committee, which started to retain part of the information about the investment projects, in order to avoid conflicts between the organizations and comply with the terms of confidentiality defined with investors. At times, however, members of the technical team were unable to limit access at the strategic level to information on ongoing projects, due to pressure from the secretaries, or directors and president of the organizations (Interviewees T, D and O). So, some ads occurred before authorized by investors or uncoordinated manner. However, during T1, the group that made up the Technical Committee understood that such a strategic level stance was inherent to organizations and to the relationship format established between them, that is, the cooperative model (Interviewees D, N and O).

The sum of the conflict between the areas and the long-term prospecting for investments slowly led the strategic level to lose interest in the project. Respondents reported that gathering the Strategic Council was extremely difficult. So the project was basically being carried out by the technical team. According to Interviewee O, the intention of the technical team when creating the figure of the Deliberative Council, during the strategic planning, was to involve strategic leaders in the project, thus leading them to give more credential for the development of the agency's actions. This objective has not been achieved. The meetings that were initially scheduled to take place every two months, in fact, were reduced to one or two meetings in the year (Interviewee O).

I remember that many times these meetings ended up taking two, three months to be scheduled because we were unable to bring everyone together on the same agenda. If the project were effectively a priority, it might not be so difficult, someone would give up an agenda or another to be able to consolidate a single agenda so that decisions could be made (Interviewee Q).

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Interviewee Q also stated that, besides the difficulty in assembling the Deliberative Council, little was resolved when the meetings took place, “the meetings were superficial and ineffective”. Interviewee G, in turn, pointed out that it was easier to bring the leaders together in a public event, where they shared the stage and talked about the project in common, than in closed meetings to discuss the direction of the agency.

According to Interviewee T, who acted as the agency's coordinator, from the moment he started his activities, the Deliberative Council, which already had a low level of integration, dispersed completely. The coordinator stated that he talked to all the leaders individually, but that in the 18 months of activity he managed to meet the strategic level on only one occasion, in mid-2017, when the employment contract was ending and would present the results of the period. After the departure of the coordinator, only two other meetings were held with all members of the Deliberative Council, one in December 2017 and the other in May 2018.

The lack of integration of the Deliberative Council forced the members of the Technical Committee to seek the approval of the agency's actions individually in their areas, increasing the time of dedication of these professionals to the agency's project. The division of the time of the members of the Technical Committee between the activities of the agency and the work routines in the specific area of activity also proved to be a relevant element for the coopetition project (Interviewee G, J, K, O and P) – reducing the level of cooperation. According to Interviewee G, both Alpha and Beta worked for themselves first, and the time that was left over was devoted to the agency's actions. Interviewee K stated that “one thing that hindered a lot was that there was no way to stay full time at the agency, we had other activities and that hindered both internal activities and the investment promotion project”.

The combination of these elements, competition in the announcement of investments, low prioritization of the project between the strategic level, and the lack of time for the team to dedicate themselves to investment promotion activities, were some of the factors that led to the erosion of the partnership, leading to the end of the coopetitive project between Alpha and Beta. The end of this relationship between organizations is better explained next.

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### **Post-coopetition Phase (T2)**

The last phase analyzed, the post-coopetition phase, refers to the period of termination of the cooperative relationship between competing organizations. This period involves the intermediate stage, in which the rupture had already occurred in practice but had not yet been made official by the organizations, and the moment after the meeting to define the end of joint activities between Alpha and Beta. This is because, as mentioned earlier, in the perception of most of the technical level participants, the end of the cooperative relationship between the organizations occurred months before the official announcement, which was unknown to most of the interviewees.

The fact that the strategic level does not prioritize the agency's project, for the reasons already reported in the previous topic, led to aggravation when there was the first change of government in 2018. In April, the administrative leader of Alfa resigned to run for another office. The replacement extinguished the activities of Alfa 2 and replaced the managers responsible for Alfa 1, 3 and 4, changing the members of the agency's Deliberative Council. In order to situate the new actors on the project, a Council meeting was held in May 2018. At this meeting, the organizations re-established their commitment to the project, however, after that, there were no further interactions at the strategic level to discuss the agency's progress.

In the same way, the elements that were already stimulating competitive conflicts and the reduction of cooperation in T1 gained greater dimension in T2, since mainly in Alfa the announcement of investments and job creation could be decisive in the political context and the members of the Technical Committee started to have greater demands due to the inauguration of the new secretaries. In August of the same year, the presidency of Beta was also changed. Although the new president had great knowledge about the project in defining priority areas for Beta's performance during the new management, investment promotion ended up not being included as a priority item.

Although the Technical Committee continued working in the agency's actions, the lack of support at the strategic level and the political moment itself reduced the team's performance during the electoral campaign period. With the victory of a new political group, the distance became even larger. According to Interviewee P, this was because the agency was actually a relationship between Alpha and

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Beta areas and did not have a structure, so when the transition team talked to each Alpha area, they were able to see only fragments of the project and not the agency as a whole.

Unlike what happened after the 2014 elections, in the 2018 elections, technical level employees were dismissed or relocated (Interviewee J, N and O), preventing “bottom-up” convincing about the relevance of the project. Likewise, with other priorities, Beta did not do the same job of convincing the maintenance of the project. Also, some policies of the new Alfa management conflicted with Beta's ideologies, leading organizations to public clashes, which led to a deterioration in the relationship between organizations (Interviewees Q and K).

Interviewee O summarized the end of the project, from Alfa's perspective, as follows:

The tactical and operational team were interested in working, researching, doing and going after it, but for some time they no longer had the support and participation of the strategic level. So, when there was a change of government, there was talk that there was a team responsible for attracting investments, that served investors, that had all the history, everything was planned, with the meetings, with defined minutes, but because it did not have the participation of strategic-level managers, they themselves did not know how to pass on to the transition team what this project was. And due to an overemphasis on cutting expenses, on control, the new management left this project aside. And then with the change of managers, with the change of personnel, things were completely lost (Interviewee O).

When questioning the Alpha 1 manager about the end of cooperation between organizations, he said that his area recognized the relevance of the project, but that he understood that it was not being carried out cohesively. Furthermore, according to Interviewee H, the administrative reform (reduction of personnel) proposed by the new administrative leader ended up disrupting the program in Alpha and as Beta also showed no interest in maintaining it, it came to an end. “It was a consensus because Beta also lost interest. There was a wear and tear that was created over time, something natural, which resulted at the end of cooperation between organizations in this project” (Interviewee H).

This wear and tear on the relationship between organizations and the lack of interest on the part of both parties to continue with the project was also highlighted in the speech of Interviewee L. According to him, in the first quarter of 2019, a few months before the end of the partnership was made official, one of the leaders of Beta had already said at a meeting attended by some members of Alfa that

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Beta was thinking about discontinuing the project, and Alfa did not speak out against the end of the partnership. Finally, neither side provided a budget for the continuity of the agency's actions, which made the Technical Committee's practical operations unfeasible (Interviewees B, N and Q). In June 2019, members of the Beta and Alpha strategic team met and chose to finalize the organizations' cooperation activities for attracting investments.

Currently, each of the organizations acts individually in promoting investments.

### **Discussion of Results**

First, it is worth noting that the premises of coopetition – dynamism, complexity, and managerially challenging (Bengtsson et al., 2016), were observed in the relationship between Alpha and Beta. The dynamism of coopetition, which refers to the fluctuation between the levels of competition and cooperation, was present in the case analyzed, since the competition between organizations increased in the face of different situations, such as the exchange of Alpha managers, meetings with investors without the presence or due communication with another organization, or even the announcement of investment projects, even in the face of a commitment to confidentiality among the technical staff of the investment promotion agency.

There was also a greater level of cooperation between the technical team and of competition at a strategic level. This is in line with the premise defended by Bengtsson and Kock (2000) that competition is usually observed in activities closer to customers, while cooperative activities are carried out away from customers. This parallel can be made, because while the technical team worked on the development and promotion of investments, the strategic level was responsible for carrying out the dissemination of projects, which can be understood as the "product" delivered to "customers", as a result of attracting investments.

The coexistence of cooperation in the promotion of investments, and competition in the announcement of projects, constantly generated tensions between organizations, showing the complexity of the relationship between Alpha and Beta. In this research, it was possible to identify that the management of contradictory elements and tensions were carried out in two different ways during the

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period of coopetition, initially with the mediation of a third party, suggested by Bengtsson and Kock (2000) as an alternative to mediate natural tensions coopetition; and, in a second moment, the integration principle or strategy was adopted, with the project members themselves becoming responsible for balancing the elements of competition and cooperation between organizations (Fernandez et al., 2014; Pellegrin-Boucher, Le Roy, & Gurău, 2013).

Concerning the antecedents of coopetition, external elements and specific drivers were identified (Bengtsson et al., 2016). As an external element, the influence of external stakeholders stands out, in this case, the investment of the Omega company, which forced the first joint work between the organizations. As specific drivers, both organizations had in their structures processes (Alpha) and relevant information (Beta), decisive for investors. If there were no such interdependence, as highlighted by Luo (2007), organizations would probably not have the motivation to cooperate. Besides, the objective of organizations to promote investments were congruent.

As a result of the coopetitive relationship, organizations have achieved a relational approach and an increase in knowledge sharing. From the data obtained, it is not possible to state that there was an increase in the number of leads or investment announcements during the period of coopetition between organizations, since, in the pre-coopetitive period, there were no controls on the number of active projects.

After five years of partnership and several scenarios of political instability - due to changes in managers in both organizations - the objectives of Alfa and Beta are no longer aligned, investment promotion is no longer prioritized by the strategic level of any of them, the team technique started to be demanded in other activities, having less and less time to dedicate to the project. As result, the coopetitive relationship ended.

Table 2 summarizes the findings regarding the premises, antecedents, results, and motivators of the end of coopetition, considering the standards arising from the theoretical framework and the research field.

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**Table 2.**  
Synthesis of the theoretical-empirical patterns of coopetition.

Assumptions	Origin of the Theoretical-Empirical Pattern	
	Theoretical Framework	Research Field
Dynamism	The fluctuation between levels of competition and cooperation; a higher level of competition when closer to the customer.	Increased competition in the face of situations that reduced trust between the team; greater competition between the strategic level (responsible for the dissemination of the captured projects) and lesser at the tactical / operational level (responsible for the capture).
Complexity	Tension between organizations.	Dispute in the disclosure of investments.
Management challenges	Third-party mediation and integration principle or strategy.	Hiring an external consultant to manage the teams; after the consultant left, the same members began to reconcile cooperative (for the project) and competitive actions (transfer of information about the projects at the strategic level for disclosure).
Background to coopetition	External to the organization: external influences; Specific drivers: complementary resources and congruent goals.	Influence of the Omega company for the beginning of cooperation between organizations; complementary processes and information for the promotion of investments; common objective: promotion of investments for the territory.
Results of competition	Improvement in the relationship and knowledge sharing between organizations.	Approximation and coexistence between the Alpha and Beta teams; sharing information about investment projects.
Motivation to end the cooperative relationship	Conflicting goals.	Political instability, low prioritization of the project between the strategic level and lack of team time.

Source: Research data.

The first phase, or pre-coopetitive moment, was marked by an investment project that exposed the benefits of working together to attract investments, by a Beta initiative for the creation of an investment promotion agency in cooperation with Alfa and for the strategic planning of this agency, which brought together the team of the two organizations. Alfa's strategic leadership was initially divided and there was some resistance to the project due to the damage to the reputation it could cause to Alfa and the lack of perspective for the project's continuity because of the elections. On the other hand, both organizations would gain greater status if they had investment projects attributed to them, in addition to the revenue from new businesses installed in the territory, which ended up enabling the continuity of the negotiations even after the change of the strategic leadership of the secretariats involved and through the reservations of the main Beta leadership about the partnership.

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The period of coopetition between organizations was marked by a high level of cooperation between the technical team for the promotion of investments (value creation) and a high level of competition in the announcements of attracted investments (value appropriation). This resulted in an approximation and sharing of knowledge between the technical level, restricted by the low number of hours that the teams had available to dedicate themselves to the project, and a larger departure from the strategic level. The agency coordinator appears as an important actor, not only for the role of mediator between the Alpha and Beta, but also as a point of comparison for the Technical Committee, which starts to realize the viability of the organizations' joint work without the presence of a mediator.

The post-coopetition moment was marked by the change in the leadership of Alpha and Beta, which also resulted in changes in the view on the role of organizations and their priorities (Interviewee K and A), which had a direct impact on the coopetition project. With the end of the project, organizations started to receive investors individually. In this case, no elements of cooperation between the organizations were identified.

A summary of the main competitive and cooperative situations reported by the interviewees in each of the periods is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
Summary of the elements of interorganizational coopetition in T0, T1 and T2.

Phases	Competition	Cooperation
T0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Protagonism in the disclosure of investments attracted to the state;</li> <li>- Responsibility for implementing the investment promotion policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotion of Omega investment;</li> <li>- Convincing Beta leaders about the coopetition project;</li> <li>- Agency strategic planning.</li> </ul>
T1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Protagonism in the disclosure of investments attracted to the state;</li> <li>- Access to project information before others involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information sharing and joint action of the technical team in the development of agendas with investors.</li> </ul>
T2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defense of conflicting ideologies between organizations in public spaces.</li> </ul>	-

Source: Research data.

As recommended by the coopetition literature, during the period of the cooperative relationship organizations cooperate and compete simultaneously (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Pellegrin-Boucher, Le Roy, & Gurău, 2013). In the case of the organizations studied there was cooperation for the promotion



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of investments but the competition continued to be present, especially with regard to the protagonism and access to information on the projects in a priority manner, demonstrating the organizations' search for power – in the form of recognition of the society as the state's investment promotion organization.

The main contribution of this study is, however, the comparing between the pre-coopetitive (T0) and post-coopetitive (T2) moments. In the first moment, the joint work of the organizations is identified by common objectives – cooperation (Padula & Dagnino, 2007), both in attracting Omega investment, as well as in convincing Beta leaders about the project and in developing the agency's strategic planning. Elements of competition are also evident in T0, as each of the organizations seeks to be recognized as the main responsible for attracting investments in the state and to overcome the other in the agility of publicizing investment projects attracted to the territory (Porter, 1990).

In turn, in T2 each of the organizations has defended its objectives generating competitive conflicts between them. In this phase, unlike T0, elements of cooperation between the organizations were not found. So, in the studied case, it can be said that while the moment before the formalization of the coopetitive relationship, seems to contemplate a kind of “informal coopetition” between companies, the post-coopetitive moment involves only competitive elements.

### **Conclusion**

This research aimed to analyze, from beginning to end, the process of inter-organizational coopetition seeking to understand the temporal patterns of coopetitive relations. Three different moments were studied: the pre-coopetition phase, which refers to the years before the formalization of the coopetition between Alpha and Beta, when, although there were already some coopetative elements, the relationship was based mainly on competition; the coopetitive period, when organizations started to act, effectively, jointly for the promotion of investments; and, the post-coopetitive period, when the organizations ended the joint activities for the maintenance of the agency and started to present competitive conflicts, without any element of cooperation. The analysis of these phases allows us to infer that the relationship of the organizations after the coopetition is of pure competition, since, unlike the pre-coopetitive moment, it does not present any element of cooperation.

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In addition, the present study explored specific elements of the studied context, and still little explored in research on coopetition: power and political instability. It was possible to identify that in the context of non-profit organizations, power appears as the main element of dispute (competition) between organizations. Political instability, as suggested by Luo (2004), in turn, seems to effectively influence negatively long-term projects, such as the one studied here, reducing cooperation and increasing competition among those involved. The low prioritization of the project between the strategic level and the lack of time of the technical and operational level team to dedicate to the project were also elements different from those already discussed in the literature, identified in the studied context as motivators for the end of the cooperative relationship.

This study has limitations regarding the method and the case studied. Due to the method used, the results presented here cannot be generalized. The organizations studied are classified as non-profit organizations, so, even though they present competitive and cooperative elements, the coopetition between them may have presented a different result from private companies, which compete aiming at improvements in the financial result. Another relevant issue to be noted refers to the high political influence and changes in public management introduced through the elections. In a context of private companies these changes tend to occur for different reasons (of the elections) and, usually, less frequently. Given these specificities of the cases analyzed the comparison with previous studies developed with private companies may not be ideal.

On the other hand, this study showed that the application of research in a context different from the traditional one, involving the integral process of coopetition in non-profit organizations, allowed the identification of elements relevant to the coopetition, which can be better explored in future research, as competitive elements distinct from the financial result (for example, power and status), periodic changes in senior management (responsible for the coopetition project) and the institutionalization of the coopetition project at different organizational levels. In this sense, it is recommended to expand the application of studies that analyze cooperative relations beyond the mainstream of R&D sectors and technology companies, as well as the identification of specific factors that lead to the transition between the different phases of the cooperative process.

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