

Linking coopetition benefits and innovative performance within small and medium-sized enterprises networks: a strategic approach on knowledge sharing and direct collaboration

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ISSN: 0368-492X

Article publication date: 8 June 2021 [Reprints & Permissions](#)

Abstract

Purpose

The present study aims to tackle SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) managers' awareness of coopetition benefits underpinning the process of knowledge sharing with a view to achieve innovative performance. The scrutiny of coopetition is placed within the context of SMEs strategic networks, which foster a fertile ground for competitive knowledge sharing and direct collaboration among members.

Design/methodology/approach

In total, 102 top managers and business owners of European steel SMEs were questioned regarding various issues related to coopetition, knowledge, collaboration and innovative performance strategies. The collected data were analyzed via the technique of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

Findings

The obtained values confirm that intense competition in the field stimulates SMEs to become aware of the benefits of co-competition. This awareness directly influences the innovative performance of the SMEs, as well as their interest in competitive knowledge sharing and their willingness to engage in direct collaboration. Direct collaboration catalyzes more intense competitive knowledge sharing at the inter-unit level whereas both direct collaboration and competitive knowledge sharing lead to better innovative performance in the case of the studied steel SMEs.

Research limitations/implications

A key theoretical contribution resides in revealing the influence of manifold factors in the overall equation of innovative performance, integrating competition, co-competition and knowledge sharing as antecedents.

Originality/value

The research advances a phenomenological view on SMEs networks in their strategy to leverage competitive knowledge and enhance system-driven innovation.