INTRA- AND INTERORGANIZATIONAL COOPERATION: TOWARD A RESEARCH AGENDA

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The 1994 Special Research Forum on Intra- and Interorganizational Cooperation is dedicated to the proposition that issues of cooperation are fundamental to management success and of increasing importance in today’s complex business world. After briefly reviewing the domain of cooperation, we use the content of the articles submitted for this special issue as a sample of current questions and research on cooperation and examine these studies relative to the domain. After introducing the work published here, we identify a set of questions pertinent to future research on cooperation.

In a series of military campaigns lasting until 448 B.C., a coalition of more than 20 Greek cities defeated the powerful empire of Persia. The success of the Greeks can be primarily attributed to their construction of the 200 ships used to defeat the Persian navy at Salamis in 480 B.C. The secret of the Greeks’ victory was their conceptualizing the ships themselves as projectiles that could ram and sink enemy vessels. To do this successfully, however, the Greek ships had to be speedier and more maneuverable than the ships they were attacking, qualities that required a very high degree of cooperation among the ships’ rowers. They had to row in virtually complete unison and be almost perfectly coordinated to outstrip and outmaneuver their opponents. Training and other methods of inducing rhythm and synchronization were important in achieving this high degree of cooperation and coordination among the rowers. Winning the battle, however, also depended upon the accurate coordination of the 200 ships into effective fleet attack formations. Otherwise the Greek ships could have interfered with each other, and chaos would have occurred. Additionally, attaining initial cooperation among the various Greek city states was important in defeating the Persians. This cooperative military achievement was the prerequisite for the subsequent flowering of Greek culture, with all of its contributions to the devel-

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development of the philosophical, scientific, political, economic, and educational systems of the Western world (McNeill, 1963).

This brief historical account suggests the difficulty, importance, and rewards of cooperation. The Greek’s victory over Persia depended upon both intra- and interunit cooperation. Writers and scholars in the field of management have emphasized the critical importance of cooperation and coordination for the achievement of objectives. Fayol (1949), whom many consider the first classical management writer, listed coordination as one of the five critical elements or functions of management. He pointed to the necessity of harmonizing the separate activities and departments of an organization into a single whole. Later, Mayo (1945), and others from the human relations school of management scholarship, put special emphasis on the need for cooperation among the levels of an organization, especially the management and worker levels. Barnard (1938) conceptualized organizations as being, more than anything else, systems of cooperative effort and coordinated activities. Thompson’s (1967) action theory of organization paid a great deal of attention to the different types of interdependence existing within organizations and to methods for achieving high levels of cooperation and coordination. Lawrence and Lorsch (1969) similarly defined an organization as a system of specialized interrelated behaviors of people that must be integrated if effective performance is to be achieved. They attributed the performance differences among the companies they studied in part to the effectiveness of the companies’ integrating mechanisms.

More recently, writers have described in greater detail the relationship of cooperation to a number of antecedent and subsequent outcome variables. For example, looking at the relationship between cooperation, coordination, and performance, Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) pointed out that coordination is necessary for innovation and competitive success. They claimed that cooperation is a prerequisite of coordination and that motivational factors are in turn prerequisites of cooperation. Similarly, Thomas’s (1992) review of the literature on conflict demonstrated that collaboration is related to high satisfaction for cooperating parties, high-quality working relationships, a large number of acceptable solutions, and high organizational performance. At the organizational level, Contractor and Lorange (1988) documented the positive relationship between cooperativeness among companies and strong levels of efficiency and profitability. Also, Buckley and Casson’s (1988) research has suggested that some cooperative organizational relationships, such as joint ventures, provide cost savings because they reduce expensive monitoring costs for companies.

Although cooperation has long been recognized as crucial to the success of enterprises, there is evidence that its role will become even more important in the future. In particular, the success of emerging structural forms, such as the self-managed task team (Manz & Sims, 1993), the horizontal organization (Byrne, 1993), the network organization (Powell, 1990), the virtual corporation (Davidow & Malone, 1992), and the international joint venture (Contractor & Lorange, 1988), rest largely on effective cooperation.
Moreover, a new market ethos, sometimes oriented toward new total quality management (TQM) philosophies, also underscores the need for cooperation throughout organizations. Indeed, McKenna and Wright (1992) pointed out that old metaphors likening organizations to machines and organisms are too simple to represent modern organizations. New metaphors, likening organizations to brains, families, and political arenas, all highlight different aspects of cooperative imperatives. Moreover, metaphors of competition as war and of success as winning no longer seem as valid in today’s complex business environment as they did in earlier times.

Although these new organizational trends demand greater attention to issues of cooperation, variation in national cultures can also present significant challenges to achieving cooperation as organizations become increasingly global. For example, people tend to cooperate less in the United States than in Sweden and Japan (Cole, 1989). Cultural differences in legal systems and in the relationship between business and government can also affect attempts to build cooperation (Perrone, 1993). For example, in Japan it is common for competitors to cooperate with one another in new product development, whereas such activity has only recently become permissible or legal in the United States, under the Cooperative Research Act of 1984. This recognition of the importance of cultural differences is in line with growing evidence that U.S.–developed economic and psychological theories cannot be generalized to other nations with different cultures (Erez & Earley, 1993).

All of the developments just noted have forced scholars to question what they really know about cooperation and to ask whether past theories and research apply to new organizational forms and realities. These developments also highlight the growing importance of new related research areas, such as interpersonal trust, cross-functional boundary spanning, team behavior, and collaborative interorganizational relationships. Our primary goal in proposing the Special Research Forum on Intra- and Interfirm Cooperation was to encourage more work on these topics. We hoped that a focused research issue would give scholars an arena in which to present their empirical findings on this topic and to identify areas of future research need and opportunity.

THE DOMAIN OF COOPERATION

The literature on cooperation is rich in theory and diverse in its academic roots. Indeed, cooperation is a topic of interest in disciplines such as economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science as well as in organizational behavior, organization theory, and strategic management. To give an example of just how much work has been done in this area, one review of the cooperation and conflict literature in political science cited over 250 empirical studies on the subject of correlates of conflict and cooperation among political entities (Gibbs & Singer, 1993). Given the wide attention that has been devoted to the topic of cooperation, it is appropriate to provide some definitional categories that may inform our analysis of current research topics and trends.
One difficulty in interpreting the theory and research on cooperation stems from the numerous definitions of cooperation scholars have offered without making much attempt to reference other usages of the term. Most definitions of cooperation focus on the process by which individuals, groups, and organizations come together, interact, and form psychological relationships for mutual gain or benefit. More recently, Ring and Van de Ven (1994) made the definition of cooperation more dynamic by including the willingness of individuals to continue in cooperative relationships. Importantly, Ring and Van de Ven noted that cooperative relationships are “socially contrived mechanisms for collective action, which are continually shaped and restructured by actions and symbolic interpretations of the parties involved” (1994: 96).

At least two types of cooperative relationships can occur: the formal and the informal. Informal cooperation involves adaptable arrangements in which behavioral norms rather than contractual obligations determine the contributions of parties. Informal cooperative mechanisms are similar to Ouchi’s (1980) clan structure, in which informal cultures and systems influence member behaviors. Axelrod (1984) discussed the conditions under which such cooperation spontaneously arises; these conditions include the parties’ perceiving they will be in contact with each other for a long time, their believing it is to their advantage to cooperate, and their recognizing they must reciprocate for any benefits received, employing a tit for tat strategy. Astley (1984) referred to this type of cooperation as voluntaristic and organic.

However, cooperation can also be characterized by contractual obligations and formal structures of control. Ouchi (1980) described formal hierarchy, or rules and regulations, as the alternative to socialized control. For example, job design and definition can force individuals to work together, whereas organizational structures and processes can detail how departments and groups must function. Clearly, formal types of cooperation can evolve over time into informal types in which rules and regulations are no longer needed (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994).

The type of cooperation can also vary with how parties are connected to one another. Vertically linked individuals, groups, and organizations can cooperate—a superior and a subordinate, the top and bottom levels of an organization, even buying and selling organizations in an industry. Or horizontally linked parties can cooperate—workers engaged in a common task or even competitors in a single industry. Cooperation involving vertical links will differ from that involving horizontal links primarily in terms of interdependence. The level of parties’ interdependence will generally be clearer and more direct in vertical links, especially those within an organization, than in horizontal links.

As is the case for most behaviors, an input-output model articulating the immediate antecedents and consequences of cooperation may be useful to explain its complexities. Although research has identified many determinants of cooperation, virtually all scholars have agreed that one especially
immediate antecedent is trust. Like other scholars, Ring and Van de Ven (1994) defined trust as an individual’s confidence in the good will of the others in a given group and belief that the others will make efforts consistent with the group’s goals. A belief that others will faithfully apply effort to achieve group goals may result in informal cooperation; a belief that a formal hierarchy will reward cooperative behavior may produce formal cooperation. Of course, trust itself has many antecedent conditions and has often been used as the dependent variable in studies of cooperation (Argyle, 1991).

Although cooperation can have many outcomes, one of the most sought after in an organizational setting is effective coordination, which is assumed to result in higher performance. Coordination concerns the combination of parts to achieve the most effective or harmonious results (Thompson, 1967). Coordination stemming from cooperation seems particularly important in today’s new organizational forms, where relationships are much more voluntary and self-defined than organizationally mandated. If work is accomplished in a fluid, ever-changing pattern of relationships that cut across functional, hierarchical, and national boundaries, high levels of cooperation may allow for an efficient and harmonious combination of the parts leading to high performance.

WORK SUBMITTED FOR THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Forty-six articles were submitted for this special issue on cooperation. The issues addressed in this set of studies can be treated as a representative list of aspects of cooperation that are currently receiving empirical attention from management scholars. We reviewed some of the topics, theories, methods, and issues examined in the submitted research to highlight current themes as well as gaps and inconsistencies.

First, the vast majority of the submissions focused on cooperation between organizations (62%). The remaining articles were almost equally split between addressing cooperation between individuals (21%) and that between groups or departments (17%). We suspect that research on organizational cooperation was dominant because this topic has only recently been viewed as important, although research on cooperation between individuals and groups has a long history in psychology and sociology. Indeed, in the United States particularly, cooperation between organizations that otherwise compete has only recently been tolerated and, in some cases involving technology, has been actually promoted by the government (see, for example, the Browning, Beyer, and Shetler article in this issue). It is noteworthy that since cooperation at any level must ultimately be reduced to cooperation between individuals—such as managers from different organizations—the distinction between the levels is blurred. Thus, macro researchers can probably learn much about cooperation from past and current studies at the micro level.

Second, the majority of the submitted articles examined informal, as opposed to formal, aspects of cooperative relationships, or transitions from
formal relationships to informal ones (57%). The level or nature of trust, either as a theoretical concept or as the actual object of empirical study, as the independent or dependent variable, was an important aspect of many of these studies. Much of this research examined the process by which individuals come together, interact, and form psychological relationships, one aspect of which is their willingness to continue in cooperative associations over time.

Third, 74 percent of the research focused on cooperation involving horizontal links. This focus is also consistent with current trends toward examining how to get individuals, groups, and organizations at the same level, who normally compete with one another, to cooperate. Some of the submitted research examined cooperation between competing mental health agencies, financial institutions, wineries, high-technology firms, and equity joint ventures or cooperation between top managers, musicians, blue-collar workers, and students.

Fourth, in terms of dependent variables, 44 percent of the submitted articles attempted to predict level of cooperation. This variable was measured in a number of different ways, ranging from a simple counting of relationships (referrals, credits, repeat ventures) to scaled questions on the level of cooperation characterizing a relationship. An additional 28 percent of the submitted studies used cooperation purely as a unmeasured theoretical concept, to explain relationships between inputs, which included individuals' backgrounds, degree of formality, level of trust, and the size of a cooperative effort, and outputs, such as performance. Another 28 percent linked measures of cooperation directly to outcomes such as satisfaction and performance. Interestingly, only a few studies examined how cooperation might interact with other variables, such as environmental factors, to affect outcomes, and no study examined the impact of past performance on the willingness of parties to continue to cooperate.

Fifth, the research submitted employed a long list of very diverse theories to help explain cooperative relationships; we discuss these alternative theories in a later section of this essay. No single theory dominated, and about a third of the submitted articles lacked any theoretical foundation. Approximately another third of the studies only mentioned theory as a framework and did not use it to formulate specific hypotheses. This pattern is surprising, given the strong multidisciplinary roots of this subject.

Finally, 66 percent of the submitted research studies were field studies using either survey or archival methods. Twenty-four percent of the submissions utilized the case method, and 10 percent involved laboratory experiments.

WORK PUBLISHED IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The five articles accepted for this issue cut across the domain of cooperation presented above and across the individual, group, and organizational units of analysis. In addition, there is significant diversity in methods, with case, laboratory, and field study approaches all represented.
“Affect- and Cognition-Based Trust as Foundations for Interpersonal Cooperation in Organizations,” by Daniel J. McAllister, examines the predictors and consequences of interpersonal trust among managers and professionals. An important conclusion of the work is that there are different forms of trust—cognitive and affect-based—each with its own predictors and associated outcomes. By articulating a distinction between these forms of trust, this article focuses attention away from simply examining level of trust. McAllister finds that variable to be inversely and directly related to need for formal rules and monitoring, however, suggesting trust can enhance coordination by lowering administrative costs, a relationship suggested by Ouchi (1980) that had not yet been examined empirically. Another finding of the research is that affect-based trust is positively related to peer performance, providing suggestive evidence that trust produces relationships beneficial to organizations.

“Studies of Individualism-Collectivism: Effects on Cooperation in Groups,” by John A Wagner III, a laboratory study focusing primarily on cooperation involving horizontal links between individuals, improves understanding of cooperation in a number of very important ways. Perhaps its most important finding is that level of cooperation can be predicted on the basis of a particular individual difference—variation on the individualism versus collectivism dimension. Given the long research tradition linking this individual difference to cultural and national differences (Hofstede, 1980), this finding suggests that theoretical models of cooperation should consider cultural differences, an idea others, including Erez and Earley (1993), have pointed out. Also, because Americans differ on individualism/collectivism (Triandis, 1989), we would expect variation in the payoffs of efforts to increase cooperation in U.S. organizations to depend on the characteristics of their employees. Specifically, such efforts should be maximally useful when targeted toward individualists but not useful among collectivists. Wagner’s article also contributes by drawing from classical social psychology theory and demonstrating its relevance to the subject of cooperation.

“Building Commitment, Attachment, and Trust in Strategic Decision-Making Teams: The Role of Procedural Justice,” by M. Audrey Korsgaard, David M. Schweiger, and Harry J. Sapienza, an experimental study focusing primarily on cooperation involving vertical links between individuals, makes a significant contribution by exploring some of the antecedents of cooperation more fully than has been done in the past. Specifically, it demonstrates how antecedent variables are related to one another. We indicated earlier that trust and an emotional attachment to a group are precursors of cooperation. This research reveals that these variables are in turn affected by other variables, such as employee inputs, supervisor reactions to those inputs, employees’ perceptions of influence and of fairness, and their willingness to cooperate in implementing decisions. The research shows that in the creation and maintenance of trust and commitment to leaders’ decisions, employees’ perceptions of procedural fairness are key; leaders demonstrating procedural fairness generate trust and commitment to their decisions. In
addition, this article highlights the ubiquitous nature of cooperation. As Maier (1970) and Vroom and Yetton (1973) pointed out, decisions can only be implemented to the degree to which they are accepted and individuals are willing to cooperate in carrying them out. This study contributes to understanding of the important components and dynamics of obtaining such cooperation.

“Building Cooperation in a Competitive Industry: SEMATECH and the Semiconductor Industry,” by Larry D. Browning, Janice M. Beyer, and Judy C. Shetler, examines an important case of achieving cooperation among competitors by exploring the dynamic process involved in building SEMATECH, a research, development, and testing consortium. Using a multimethod, comprehensively grounded case study, the authors identify the rich and perhaps unique steps and processes that led to the development of trust and cooperation at SEMATECH. This cooperation is described as both informal and dynamic. Emerging from an early period of disorder, conflict, and ambiguity to the development of a moral community characterized by giving, friendship, and faith, SEMATECH underwent a process described as sequential and interactive. A major finding of the study is that leaders, especially when serving as role models in developing a moral community, can play an important role in building trusting relationships. Browning and colleagues use 17 dimensions organized into three core categories to explain how cooperation was achieved and even expanded at SEMATECH. Another important contribution of the article is its interpretation of results in light of complexity theory, according to which a system of increasing complexity reaches a bifurcation point at which the old system disintegrates and a new order arises.

Like Browning, Beyer, and Shetler’s work, “Does Familiarity Breed Trust? The Implications of Repeated Ties for Contractual Choice in Alliances,” by Ranjay Gulati, focuses on cooperation between organizations. This article extends transaction cost explanations of joint ventures by examining the role of repeated alliances between partners. Specifically, Gulati finds that the likelihood of the use of equity sharing between partners, an arrangement that gives partners formal control over each other, decreases with an increase in the partners’ experience together, as indicated by repeated alliances. The theoretical argument is that familiarity between partners breeds trust, and trust replaces legal relationships like equity sharing as a governance system. The research also demonstrates that formal equity-based alliances are more likely to occur between dissimilar and thus potentially nontrusting partners, such as those from different countries, than between more similar partners. The article’s principal theoretical contribution is its combination of arguments from the social psychology literature on trust and transaction cost economics arguments regarding interfirm alliances. Combining micro and macro theories in the study of cooperative endeavors suggests a new set of variables that those interested in interorganizational relationships might fruitfully examine.
QUESTIONS ON COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

The research published here and our reflections on the process of putting together this special issue reveal a number of issues and questions pertaining to the subject of cooperation and coordination.

What Are the Antecedents of Cooperative Relationships?

According to the articles published in this issue, a number of factors predict level of cooperation. Obviously, the levels of empirical support found for these predictors differ considerably. Nonetheless, the research suggests several important variables. First, trust seems fundamental. Four of the five articles published here either set out to study trust or describe findings about the role of trust in cooperative relationships as key. The study of trust and its impact on cooperative relationships at all levels may be a particularly fruitful area of future research. The McAllister and Gulati articles provide several useful insights and guidelines for such research. In addition, Browning, Beyer, and Shetler found that trust can be built through leadership and a belief that the outcomes of trust and cooperation are worthwhile and necessary.

A number of other predictors of cooperative relationships are identified in this special issue. Murnighan (1994) discriminated between structural and psychological determinants of cooperation, and the authors represented here identify examples of each type. Psychological determinants of cooperation identified here include similarity in partners’ values, the perceived status and legitimacy of partners, and the perception that interactive procedures are just. Structural determinants of cooperation identified in this issue include the number of partners in a relationship, the extent of their prior social ties as related to perceived reliability and predictability, and the social context in which cooperation occurs. Thus, a wide variety of psychological and structural variables have relevance to predicting cooperation.

The research described in the articles published in the forum suggests that additional research is needed on the conditions that give rise to naturally occurring cooperation. Most of the cooperation investigated here was in a context of formal structure and authority. Yet the factors that allow spontaneous cooperation to occur, as it does in social action groups, trade associations, and industry cartels, may be quite different. We also note that, with the exceptions of the McAllister and Korsgaard and colleagues’ studies, the articles invoke trust as an explanation for their findings without actually measuring it. Thus, an obvious direction for future research is the direct empirical assessment of trust’s role in these processes.

What Are the Dynamics of Cooperative Relationships?

Zajac and Olsen (1993) proposed a stage model of cooperative relationships composed of an initializing stage, a processing stage, and a reconfiguration stage with feedback loops to the earlier stages. Ring and Van de Ven
(1994) proposed a number of factors that allow cooperative relationships to evolve or dissolve over time. Treating cooperation as a dynamic process where participants constantly evaluate their decision to continue to cooperate is useful. Zajac and Olsen suggested that a dynamic perspective focuses attention on cooperative feedback mechanisms and decision points and on the issues that individuals must weigh in their analysis of any cooperative relationship. Yet there is little empirical evidence of the influence of such feedback mechanisms on cooperation or of the effect of past performance on an individual’s decision to continue in a cooperative relationship. Indeed, the process may be much less cognitive, conscious, and calculated than the above discussion suggests. McAllister’s inclusion of affect-based trust in his model suggests a trust process that unfolds in a more emotional and uncalculated manner. Browning and colleagues’ work, however, in its description of how the U.S. semiconductor industry’s market share loss to the Japanese drove cooperation at SEMATECH, highlights the conscious, more calculated sources of cooperative relationships. Clearly, more research is required on how performance both brings parties together and influences them to continue in cooperative relationships.

The temporal dynamics of cooperative relationships also warrant attention. In this issue, Gulati documents an evolution from formal cooperation to informal cooperation based on the frequency of previous relationships, and Browning, Beyer, and Shetler describe a movement from conflict and ambiguity during initial relationship formation at SEMATECH to giving, structure, process, and openness. However, additional research is needed on the dynamics of cooperation and in particular, on the factors that cause cooperative relationships to end. For example, in what proportion do partners weigh financial rewards against personal satisfaction in the decision to continue a cooperative arrangement? What institutional and environmental factors prolong or lead to the breakup of a cooperative relationship?

Bringing a systems perspective to bear on the study of cooperation might also yield important insights on cooperative dynamics. As the articles in this special research forum suggest, cooperation can be a dynamic process in which individuals react to the behaviors of others in a timely and speedy manner. Perceptions related to subsequent cooperative behaviors are likely to be shaped by a wide variety of influences, some of which might be very far removed from the immediate decision. Improving understanding of the causes and consequences of cooperation will probably require researchers to move away from simple bivariate analyses of cooperation to more sophisticated multivariate longitudinal research methods.

What Are the Outcomes of Cooperative Relationships?

Of the research published in this issue, only McAllister’s article examines outcomes (in particular, performance), and it does not directly measure cooperation. Clearly, more research is needed on the outcomes of cooperation. We would suggest, too, that researchers expand the set of outcomes considered. Most of the previous research that has linked cooperation to
outcomes has focused on performance variables and individual satisfaction variables. This focus is consistent with the conceptualization of cooperation as a dynamic process: cooperation will not continue if its benefits do not equal or exceed its costs. Thus, the benefits are typically defined in terms of performance and satisfaction. However, many of the benefits of cooperation, at least to an organization, can be defined in noneconomic terms; benefits might include fast cycle time of product to market, improved quality, high-quality decision making, improved competitiveness, and so on. These dimensions can be seen as the intervening variables that help to explain why cooperation might enhance performance and satisfaction. Nonetheless, researchers would benefit from examining a broader and more proximal set of outcome variables.

In addition, most of the writing on cooperation tends to have a very positive tone, especially the work from the social and behavioral science disciplines. However, cooperation among individuals, groups, and organizations can have harmful consequences for others and for performance. For example, studies of Japanese culture have described how its excessive emphasis on cooperation has led to problems of bias, bullying, conformity, and economic collusion, to the detriment of various groups in that country. The Wagner article in this issue suggests that cooperation can lead to exhaustion and other problems associated with collectivist tendencies; Korsgaard and colleagues’ article points out that procedures designed to elicit cooperation or acceptance may do the opposite if individuals perceive the procedures as a sham. Moreover, McAllister suggests that a high level of cognition-based trust may be a principal predictor of social loafing and “free riding.” Some other deleterious effects of cooperation have been described: “groupthink” (Janis, 1972), coordination of pricing (Scherer & Ross, 1990), and exclusion of noncooperators from positions of power (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Obviously, additional research is needed on the potential drawbacks of cooperation and the conditions under which a very high degree of cooperation is not desirable.

What Theoretical Perspectives Help Explain Cooperative Relationships?

Many theoretical frameworks can be used to describe cooperation. To provide a useful guide to future research on cooperation, we have organized the various theories in the cooperative literature into five broad categories.

**Exchange theories.** Theories in which cooperation is viewed as a means of maximizing economic or psychological benefits are exchange theories (Blau, 1964). Exchange theories appear in the fields of psychology, sociology, political science, and economics, and these different disciplines seem to have similar perspectives on how the exchange process is related to cooperation. The parties to a relationship become willing to cooperate when the benefits of cooperation exceed the costs. Specific theories of exchange include transaction cost theory, social psychology theories of exchange, micro and macro sociological theories of exchange, reinforcement theory, sym-
bolic interaction theory, and rational or normative decision-making theories. Theories of exchange may be most appropriately employed to explain the conscious and calculated reasons for parties' coming together to cooperate and continuing to engage in cooperative relationships.

**Attraction theories.** A second category of theories focuses on what attracts individuals and groups to each other and what seems to create natural affinity or its opposite (Hollinghead, 1950; Kennedy, 1944). Theories of interpersonal attraction are based on such variables as value or status similarities and differences, complementary needs, aspects of personality, goal congruence, and information needs. Obviously, attraction theories overlap with exchange theories to some degree. However, attraction theories allow the modeling of noneconomic, uncalculated costs and benefits of cooperative relationships, such as personal attraction and interpersonal fit. Such theories emphasize the noneconomic aspects of the formation of relationships. In this forum, McAllister invokes some of these theories in his discussion of affect-based trust, as do Korsgaard and colleagues, in examining some antecedents of trust.

**Power and conflict theories.** Emerson (1962) and Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) focused on tendencies toward conflict or its opposite, cooperation. Within this framework, diversity in individuals' and groups' goals, values, and resources, which can create perceptions of injustice or inequities, can explain conflict, and cooperation can presumably be explained by the opposite. This theory category also includes theories that focus on caste systems in organizations and nations or that highlight heterogeneity or homogeneity as sources of cooperative difficulties. Thus, power and conflict theories overlap with attraction theories. Power and conflict theories would seem especially useful in predicting the dynamics of cooperative relationships over time. For example, as the power differences between parties in a relationship increase, formal rather than informal forms of cooperation may be required. Power differences may also allow prediction of communication, conflict, and free riding.

**Modeling theories.** These focus on the social learning process and the importance of social learning, or imitation and modeling, in the emergence of cooperation between individuals and in organizations (Bandura, 1971; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, many cooperative behaviors or arrangements arise because exemplar or referent individuals, groups, or organizations use them and thus legitimize them. This theory category stresses the importance of conformity, consistency, and the creation of norms of cooperative behavior through contrived group, organizational, and societal cultures. Importantly, modeling theories point to predictive factors outside of a focal cooperative relationship itself.

**Social structure theories.** Such theories emphasize the role of structural factors in fostering cooperation (Blau, 1974). More specifically, structural theories seek to explain the emergence of cooperative relationships in terms of aggregated conditions of the system within which cooperation occurs. Structures consist of social positions of individuals, groups, organizations,
and networks that are both differentiated and interrelated. Structural variables might include number of participants, heterogeneity and homogeneity, distance, history, and power. Like modeling theories, social structure theories look to dimensions outside a relationship to predict cooperation and coordination. Network theory, an especially popular example of social structure theory (Nohria & Eccles, 1992), explains cooperation in terms of the position of the cooperating partners in a network of relationships.

Although the above menu of theories has wide applicability, it is unlikely that any single theory can fully explain the complexities of cooperation. Thus, a multitheoretical perspective can yield important insights, as this special research forum demonstrates. For example, the joining of exchange and attraction theories helped McAllister articulate two different forms of trust. In addition, a multidisciplinary approach to the subject may also yield important insights. For example, Gulati combines ideas from economics and social psychology to explain why repeat alliances become less formally structured. Moreover, perhaps new theories are needed to capture the cooperation involved in new forms of organizing. For example, in describing cooperation at SEMATECH, Browning and colleagues borrow complexity theory from the physical sciences to help explain how an ordered system arose from apparent chaos. Continued study of cooperative relationships as they are played out within today's new organizational forms may lead scholars to search for new theories that are better able to capture these complexities.

**What Research Method Is Ideal for Studying Cooperative Relationships?**

McGrath (1964) described the evolution of the methods used to study a particular research topic and the knowledge that results. Researchers often begin with case analysis to identify the basic domain and issues to be considered. The second methodological phase often involves archival and field studies that explore basic and relatively simple relationships. The third phase examines specific relationships in controlled laboratory settings. Finally, research might return to the case method to fully identify various facets of a model and the relationships found in it.

Given all the prior research on cooperation that has been conducted in the multitude of disciplines, knowledge on the subject might be considered to be in its final stages. But given the new guises in which cooperative efforts are showing up within today's organizations, research might also be considered to be in its infancy. The state of knowledge on the subject will in part depend on whether past research on cooperation is relevant in today's complex organizations. There is also growing evidence that research carried out in the United States may not generalize well to other cultures (Erez & Earley, 1993). Regardless, a more definitive statement or catalog of knowledge on cooperation is necessary.

Clearly, more longitudinal case studies that are capable of capturing the complexities and dynamics of cooperation are needed. However, these case studies need to be simplified and replicated with field work and ultimately,
with simulations and laboratory studies. It would also seem important for researchers to replicate past discipline-based studies in today’s business context to test generalizability. Moreover, we suggest that much of the micro-level research on cooperation can be applied to the study of cooperation between organizations, which continues to be a major topic of interest and relevance in the present organizational world.

**CONCLUSION**

Everywhere today, one hears of the importance of cooperation for business success. Whether raised by a chief executive giving a public speech extolling the virtues of cross-functional cooperation, or by a popular press article highlighting new ways of accomplishing work with self-managed teams, or even by business leaders lobbying Congress to allow new forms of interfirm cooperation, the subject of cooperation is very much in the news and on the minds of business leaders.

This research topic represents a real opportunity for management scholars. We are frequently exhorted to address “real” problems facing “real” managers (cf. Hambrick, 1994). In cooperation research, we have such a problem, for managers are generally not very skilled in building cooperative relationships or in creating conditions that foster cooperation among others. Thus, if the managers of today’s firms are to be like the Greeks of 448 B.C., able to create organizations that are as speedy and maneuverable as the Greeks’ ships were, they need to understand the causes and consequences of cooperation. Because they can juxtapose understanding of the deep roots in academic disciplines of these topics with a good understanding of current business realities, management scholars are well positioned to provide the necessary understanding and advice. Our greatest hope for this special research forum is that it will stimulate the field to take advantage of this position and to create the necessary knowledge and insight.

The articles in this special issue reflect cutting-edge theories and research on cooperation. This research contributes to an understanding of how cooperation can be fostered and continued in today’s complex organizations and provides insight into the management of emerging structural forms, such as self-managed work teams, horizontal organizations, network organizations, virtual organizations, and international alliances. However, the articles do not always make that translation directly. Thus, the work reported here should be translated, applied, and commented upon by practitioners.

Although the contribution of this special group of articles is significant, much work remains to be done. Importantly, there is a need for a more systematic examination of the theoretical mechanisms that govern cooperation. Are there few or many? What is the relative importance of each? Are these mechanisms equally applicable at all levels, or do different causal processes explain cooperation at the individual, group, and organizational levels? Second, trust emerges from this set of articles as a key antecedent to cooperation, yet little exists in the management literature on this important
topic. If the interest in cooperation spurs a more careful and thoughtful examination of trust, the payoff is potentially quite high, as trust seems highly relevant to topics beyond those studied here. Third, the purported rewards of cooperation need to be established. Although business rhetoric suggests the importance of cooperation, corroborating scientific evidence is necessary. In addition, it would seem equally important to identify the conditions in which cooperation has the highest payoff. Finally, these articles suggest that insight into cooperation will require cross-level, cross-disciplinary multimethod examinations. Researchers taking a macro view and interested in cooperative relationships between firms may benefit from considering "soft" variables, such as trust and empathy. Researchers taking a micro perspective and able to articulate the psychological dynamics of cooperation will need to describe the impact of those dynamics on firm performance and how they play out when the issue is how two firms might better cooperate than compete. Both sets of scholars also need to be open to theories from other disciplines that might provide insights into this phenomenon. Such cross-disciplinary and cross-level openness may thus be an important by-product of promoting more, and more thoughtful, research on the topic of cooperation.

REFERENCES


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