

The multiplication of coopetitive strategies in south of France wine industry

Julien Granata

GSCM - Montpellier Business School, France

Montpellier Research in Management

j.granata@supco-montpellier.fr

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- *Purpose: Coopetition strategies, in which firms simultaneously cooperate and compete (Nalebuff and Brandenburger, 1996), adopt more complex relations among several partners (Dagnino and Padula, 2002). The limit of coopetition strategies among numerous partners isn't specifically yet studied by the coopetition literature while the complexity of this relation leads to overcome many limits.*
 - *Design: In order to fill the gap mentioned above we propose to study this new phenomenon. Our research focuses on the Pic Saint-Loup union case study in the wine sector.*
 - *Findings: The contribution of our research is threefold. First, after identifying all the drivers of risks, the loss of action freedom created by the barriers to entry appears as the main coopetitive strategy limit. Second, the case reveals that coopetitors do not content themselves with merely a single collective unit but rather they multiply their coopetitive strategies to overcome limits. Third, this exploratory study highlights the multiplication of coopetition phenomenon in the wine sector, perhaps necessary for performance.*
 - *Practical implications: This exploratory study provides a peripheral coopetitive strategies portfolio for managers of wine sector.*

Key words: coopetition, multiplication, peripheral coopetitive strategies, wine sector, limits.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Coopetitive environments are situations in which firms simultaneously cooperate and compete with competitors (Nalebuff and Brandenburger, 1996). Although coopetition research has focused more on dyadic relationships, coopetition among numerous competitors can be investigated as relationship network. Dagnino and Padula (2002) highlight the potential involvement of numerous partners in coopetitive strategy. Their study emphasized the complexity of coopetition among several firms.

Alliances are instable by nature (Das and Teng, 2000). Considered as complex when they involve numerous partners (Dagnino and Padula, 2002) coopetition strategies aren't without risk (Gnyawali and Park, 2009). According to Gnyawali et al. (2008), coopetition strategies could lead firms to focus successively on competition and then on cooperation. The authors propose a framework, which identifies several coopetitive collaborations, including the relation between more than two firms without analyzing it in detail. The study of multiple relations deserves more in-depth analysis to understand their complexity, and to appreciate how firms overcome the tension tied. Generally, the coopetition implications have yet benefited of a little empirical research (Ketchen et al., 2004).

Wine clusters explain the success of new producer countries model (Spawton and Forbes, 1997). In wine clusters, firms are in competition compared with the cooperative model of traditional wine countries like France. Although the findings about how clusters grow can benefit companies producing wine, wine research clusters remains limited (Dana and Winstone, 2008; Aylward, 2004; Porter and Bond, 2004). No research has yet specifically attached to describe the coopetitive relation and its evolution within a wine cluster (Dana et al., 2011). However, coopetitive strategies have developed especially in the French wine industry, as well, for several reasons: very small familial firms needed to cooperate in order to survive, aggressive new competitors making competition fiercer and a high degree of industry institutionalization further supported local cooperation.

The phenomenon specificities lead to use qualitative research with empirical approach. The case study is adapted to the study of new phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1984) and equally appropriate for analyzing complex situations. We investigate the case of Pic Saint-Loup professional union of winegrower, in the Languedoc-Roussillon region, localized in south of France. The study permits to meet twenty-three firms involved in the union among the forty-eight actual members. The use of a snowball sample (Goodman, 1961) leads to realize forty-five semi-structured interviews in order to analyze a phenomenon of multiplication of coopetitive strategies ties among them. In consequence, several types of coopetitive strategies are identified.

The contribution of our research is threefold. First, the loss of action freedom created by the barriers to entry appears as the main limit of coopetitive strategies. Second, the case reveals that SMEs do not content themselves with merely a single collective unit but rather they multiply their coopetitive strategies, thereby enhancing their competitiveness. Third, this exploratory study highlights the multiplication of coopetition phenomenon in the wine sector, perhaps necessary for performance. Finally, this exploratory study provides a coopetition strategy portfolio for managers of wine sector.

2. THE LIMITS OF COOPETITION

Generally, coopetition strategies aren't without risk (Gnyawali and Park, 2009). Bresser and Harl (1986) explore the dichotomy between competition and cooperation to identify that firms engaged in cooperative strategies in order to limit turbulence in their operating environment. According to the authors, the collective strategies created result in common rules that limit the flexibility of any one firm engaged. Overcoming the dysfunctions tied to individual and collective strategies lead firms to combine either strategy (Bresser, 1988).

Alliances are considered as instable by nature (Das and Teng, 2000) and faced the paradox of co-operation and competition within (Clarke-Hill et al., 2002). Talking about coopetition, Dagnino and Padula (2002) define as "complex" the coopetition relation among several partners, which develop several activities in the value chain. Coopetition leads to psychological challenge and organizational complexity (Gnyawali et al., 2008). Temporal and or spatial sharing could resolve situations of paradoxical complexity (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). Bengtsson and Kock (2000) argued that firms could distribute competitive and collaborative actions among diverse person or diverse business unit. In the situation of simultaneous competition and cooperation, recent scholars suggest the relevance of temporal or spatial sharing (Chen, 2008; Oliver, 2004; Clark et al., 2003; Bengtsson and Kock, 2000).

There is a temporal dimension to the duality of cooperation and competition (Clarke-Hill et al., 2003). The tension and complexity of coopetition lead firms to focus successively on competition for a period of time and then on cooperation for the following period (Gnyawali et al., 2008). If one of the coopetition dimensions becomes tacit or hidden, the paradoxical complexity will also be reduced (Oliver, 2004; Bengtsson and Kock, 2000). Sometimes, institutions or peripheral organizations can facilitate coopetition (Bengtsson and Kock, 2000; Sakakibara, 1993).

The multiplication of activities and firms involved make complex the coopetition relation (Dagnino and Padula, 2002). Some studies have focused on coopetition relationships in networks between more than two partners (Gnyawali et al., 2008; Mariani, 2007; Ims and Jakobsen, 2006; M'Chirgui, 2005; Levy et al., 2003; Gnyawali and Madhavan, 2001; Chaudri and Samson, 2000). Gnyawali et al., (2008) propose a framework to understand coopetition by making a distinction between vertical or horizontal relationships, and between temporal or spatial separation. From a dyadic perspective, the authors distinguish four situations of coopetition. For the relationships between more than two firms, they did not analyze the separation in detail.

We argue that the study of multiple relationships deserves more in-depth analysis to understand the complexity of the ties among numerous coopetitors. This study could help to understand how coopetitors overcome the tensions of coopetition. We suppose that a high number of partners lead to a high degree of complexity and important limits. The limits of competition strategies among numerous partners isn't specifically yet studied by the coopetition literature.

3. METHODS

3.1. The case study method

The research is based on an in-depth case study. The method of case is appropriate for the study of new or poorly understood phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989) by permitting the access at empirical situation. Coopetition process is complex, including numerous actors with several social ties. The case study seems to be adapted at coopetition phenomena (Gnyawali and Park, 2010). We investigate the coopetitive strategy case of the Pic Saint-Loup wine union in southern France, localized few kilometers northern Montpellier.

The case study is defined by Yin (1984) as an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in the context of real life. Further to the author, multiple sources of data are incorporated at the case study including primary data, like interviews and observation, and secondary data as professional archives and articles. The data collect is realized by triangulation (Jick, 1979; Campbell and Fiske, 1959). According to Bengtsson et al. (2010), studying the development of coopetition process is essential. We opted for studying the dynamic of the process by asking respondents to tell the story of the union.

The data are collected in forty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews lead with twenty-three owner-managers of firms involved in the union, manager of wine professional unions, competitors, and distributors. These interviews, recorded by means of a Dictaphone voice-recording device, create reliable data through specific words of participants (Patton, 2002). They were systematically complemented by site visits, observation, and informal dialogue. We use a snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961), the first respondents permitting to identify the others (Kuezl, 1992; Patton, 1990), in order to identify key participants. The findings were transcribed and analyzed to extract manually the coded segments (Miles and Huberman, 1994) with interview identification numbers. These segments were subjected to thematic content analysis.

The union archives were analyzes in the union office several days. During the collection of theses secondary data, free conversations with the manager and the president of the union were led. This stage of collection permits many observations. Others observations were led during the collective actions organized by the union like collective days of promotion, collective tasting or collective showrooms during international professional salons.

3.2. The case of Pic Saint-Loup Union in the French wine industry

We investigate the French wine industry, a particularly dynamic environment with many firms involved in international competition. Anderson (2004) argues that the wine sector must face globalization effects with an exponential internationalization in the wine trade. According to the author, globalization has resulted in the formation of large-scale players aiming to dominate the global market. In this new environment, wine clusters have come to predominate in new world countries as New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Argentina or United States. Porter (1998, 78) defines clusters as “geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field”. Porter and Bond (2004), studying the “Napa Valley” wine cluster in California, argue that clusters develop competition among member firms.

It therefore seems that cooperative strategies are widely used in the wine sector and may explain the success of clusters. However, cooperative strategies have developed in the French wine industry, as well, for several reasons:

- Very small familial firms needed to cooperate in order to survive, leading to the adoption of winemaking cooperatives;
- Aggressive new competitors and liberalized markets emerged from globalization, making competition more fierce;
- The high degree of industry institutionalization further supported local cooperation.

We investigate the Pic Saint-Loup wine union in southern France, an exemplary case of successful cooperation among competitors. When data was being collected, the Pic Saint-Loup area of production comprised three winemaking cooperatives and forty-five independent winemaking firms cooperating while being in competition. Since the number of competitors growth to currently attempt forty-eight independent winemaking firms with the cooperatives. All the Pic Saint-Loup firms are small size firms in charge of transforming its own grape production and then selling wine. In cooperative winemaking structures, associate growers commit the grapes at the producing structure. Independent winemaking structures are growers and producers. The case study allowed meeting twenty-three firms involved in the union; all the winemaking cooperatives are interviewed.

Large firms of new world countries develop international brands rely on concentration strategies in order to realize economies of scale. For the others, overcome the globalization context by improving the quality of wine isn't enough. Marketing or distribution strategies become real drivers of success. To develop brands, SMEs need to organize collectively. Consequently, the Pic Saint-Loup winegrowers launch a cooperative strategy of differentiation relies on the "Pic Saint-Loup" collective brand. The French notion of "terroir", based on a geographical identification, federates winemaking structures of the area around the collective brand. They cooperate to support a collective brand by adopting a geographical label of distinction. Developing the same distribution network of wine shoppers and retailers, union members are directly in competition with their individual brands.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. The limits of cooperation

In 1988, the Pic Saint-Loup wine union started in order to develop a collective brand by federating individual firms that support their commercialization on individual brands. Despite the geographical dimension of the collective brand, regional institutions and professional organizations don't lead the cooperative strategy. Currently, the Pic Saint-Loup wine production zone is considered as being among the premium wine area of the Languedoc-Roussillon region. The economic success of the firms involved within the cooperative strategy quickly attracts new union members.

The arrival of new members leads to a need of formalization in order to federate numerous competitors. By setting a formal professional union relies on an associative organization, competitors federate their collective action. They create democratic instances of governance, with democratic elections, as an association board which elects a president. Every year, all the union members are assembled during the annual general meeting of members. The formalization permits to collect a membership fee in order to employ a

salaried manager in charge of federating the collective actions such as respecting the collective norms of production, organizing collective meeting, and promoting the production zone.

The manager enhances the cooperation between members unlike competition that he's never in charge. With the increasing number of union members, starting at ten for the creation to achieve forty-eight in 2008, the union set up several specialized commissions of work as the economic group, the environmental group, and the promoting group. Thereby, beyond using a collective brand, all the union members could be involved in the collective actions through the specialized commissions. These collective specialized commissions enhance the collective actions and tend to promote the cooperation to the detriment of competition. In order to maintain an important degree of competition between the competitors, the union is open to integrate new members and let free the individual competitive actions.

Increasing the number of members opens the union at opportunist behaviors. Opportunist new members could be tempted to only benefiting from the collective efforts without respecting a qualitative way of production or distribution. The risk lies in the adoption of a volume strategy, by flooding the market with cheap wine, which benefits from the qualitative reputation. Consequently, the qualitative reputation of the production zone, which represents the main strategic resources of the cooperative strategy, will be menaced. The stake to maintain a qualitative action leads competitors to build barriers to entry by adopting a decree of production. This decree requires members to strictly adopt the same qualitative norms of production. For instance, they have to limit their production volume and to use a restrictive number of grape varieties that must be blending. The decree also limits the geographic area of production. Finally, all new members since 1994 have to wait six years before obtaining the right to use the collective brand.

The building of barriers to entry enhances the cooperation between members and the success of the cooperative strategy. However, a negative effect appears with the evolution of the wine global market. The consumption of grape varieties without blending, more white or pink wines and fewer complexes, increase gradually. The production norms of the union narrow the individual flexibility of members. They aren't able to quickly adapt their production to the global market evolutions. Thereby, after the success, the cooperative strategy creates an enclosing effect that stifles the individual flexibility of members. This enclosing effect could be fatal to the individual capacities and tend to create only a cooperative space. It represents an important limit to the competition process.

4.2. How to overcome the competition limits?

Overcoming the limits of enclosing becomes the competition stake for benefiting from the cooperative strategy, that positive effect of competition. Far from leaving the cooperative strategy, the members of the Pic Saint Loup union adhere to other peripheral cooperative strategies. Excepted two new members launching their activity, all the respondents adhere at one or several peripheral cooperative strategies until assuming central functions within. These two new members met aren't yet officially Pic Saint-Loup producers because they must wait for the sixth year in accordance with the union decree.

These peripheral cooperative strategies take diverse forms by involving only one or several members of the union, sometimes with other competitors outside the union and far

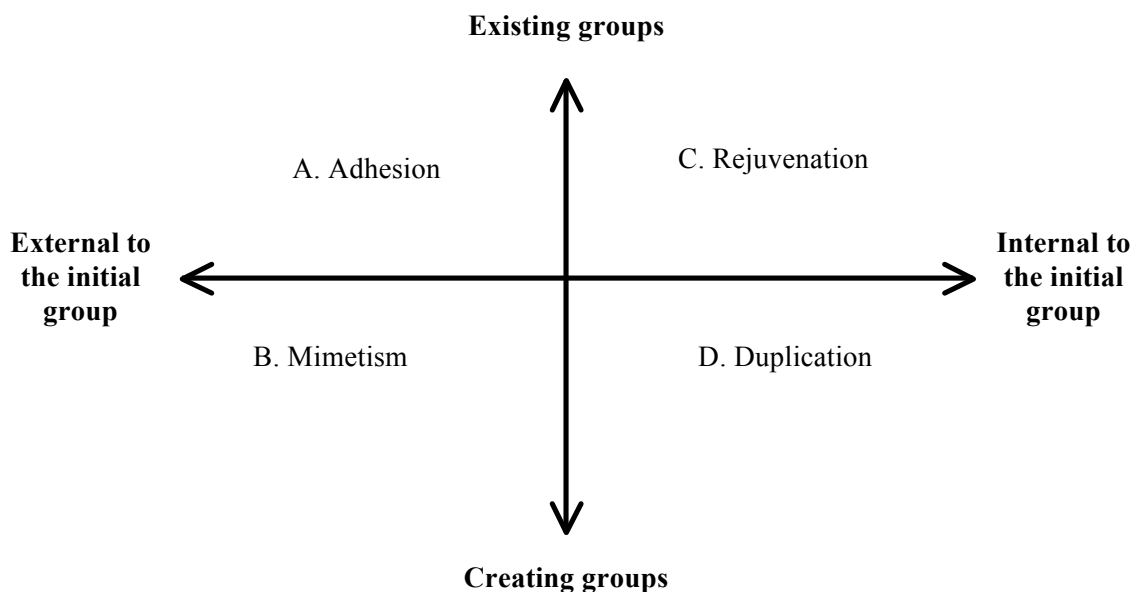
from the geographic area of Pic Saint Loup. Next to the initial cooperative strategy, our study allows identifying forty-six accessions, yielding an average of two memberships per enterprise.

The importance of this phenomenon can be measured by the active participation of the owner-managers in the elaboration of some of these cooperative strategies and by their willingness to fill important positions at the collective level.

On average, the owner-managers of the Pic Saint Loup wineries dedicate two and a half days per month to managing peripheral cooperative strategies. This tendency towards the development of cooperation is inevitable because, according to one of the interviewed owner-managers, French winemakers are too small to compete on their own. Firms thus seek to overcome the limits to the freedom of action created by the barriers to entry set up by the collective structure and instead benefit from trade opportunities.

The case study shows that the multiplication of cooperative strategies may be implemented in four ways (figure 1).

Figure 1. Peripheral cooperative strategies



A. Peripheral cooperative strategy of adhesion: the strategy consists of adhering to an existing cooperative strategy initiated and formalized by external actors to the initial group. Standing involved in the initial PSL strategy, the firm could join a new group of competitors. This allows, for example, the use of another collective brand as per geographic areas. In France, diverse structures for cooperation among competitors take place in several protected denominations of origin as the qualitative denomination “AOP” (Protected Appellation of Origin).

Other forms of labeling are also based on geographic location as ‘IG’ (Geographic Indication). It also allows one to take steps towards obtaining an organic certification and a

label such as 'AB' (Biologic Agriculture) to develop sustainable practices. Joining external cooperative strategy permits to directly benefit from specialized distribution channels by adapting at new norm of production.

B. Peripheral cooperative strategy of mimetism: the strategy involves members of the union in dealing with actors outside the initial group of cooperators, in a cooperative process similar to the initial cooperative process. This leads to the creation of a collective structure that borrows concepts from other groups. For instance, it can be initiated with regional firms like the club 'Vignobles et signatures', in order to promote the best winegrower of each production zone of Languedoc-Roussillon region, or others firms outside the region. The creating external cooperative strategy permits to develop other distribution channels by distributing the existing production.

C. Peripheral cooperative strategy of rejuvenation: the strategy concerns all or some members of the existing group, in reproducing the initial cooperative strategy within a new project and another collective structure. In our case, this concerns the remobilization by some members of an old union of wine 'Vins de pays du Val de Montferrand' to produce new wines with this distinct collective brand. This type of existing structure restoration allows cooperators to benefit from the attractiveness of the global wine market for wines grape varieties, without jeopardizing the initial cooperative strategy.

Moreover, it is not a secret that some members of the Pic Saint-Loup union also have ambitions to be affiliated with a higher level of quality. Another rejuvenation cooperative strategy is in project for distinguishing the higher qualitative wines of Pic Saint-Loup.

D. Peripheral cooperative strategy of duplication: the strategy engages all or some of the existing group members in creating a cooperative strategy. Pursuing different goal in comparison with the initial cooperative strategy, this new cooperative strategy takes form outside the union organization. It leads to the creation of an *ad hoc* collective structure or it becomes organized in an informal fashion, to carry out the strategy that may consist of managing specific actions of promotion or mutualizing other human resources and materials. The main examples are the creation of an 'employers group' mutualizing human resources and several 'CUMA' (Agricola Material Union Cooperative) sharing expensive winegrowers' material as tractors. Developing internal cooperative strategies of duplication permit to launching collective project with cooperators, outside the initial cooperative strategy organization, and conserve their own relationships with other members to compete.

4.3. The risk of the cooperative strategies multiplication

The multiplication of the cooperative process by launching peripheral cooperative strategies offers several opportunities but isn't without risks. The phenomenon seems to create some limits that cooperators must overcome.

The multiplication of cooperative strategies leads to the development of several tensions as the management of several norms, the need of coherence between brands or products positioning, and the development of the competition between the distribution channels or the cooperators. These tensions aren't without risks. For the cooperators, the aims are to limit their individual flexibility or to create artificially a competition on price. For the initial cooperative strategy, it appears a risk of weakening by impacting its reputation or

reaching a too high degree of competition within, and consequently setting the conditions of the cooperation ending.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Pic Saint-Loup case study allows identifying the evolution of cooperation limits, which lead to the main limits of each collective strategy. By enhancing cooperation between partners, the collective strategies lead to decrease their competitive flexibility (Astley and Fombrum, 1983; Bresser and Harl, 1986). Four drivers are gradually identified (table 1).

Table 1. The evolution of cooperation limits

Limit drivers	Limits	Limits overcoming
Increase the number of competitors	Informal exchange become impossible	Formalization in order to federate numerous competitors
Formalization	Cooperation increase unlike competition	New members integration
New members arrival	Opportunistic behaviors appear	Barriers to entry construction
Barriers to entry	Limit the individual flexibility and the strategic adaptation	Temporal or spatial sharing (Bengtsson and Kock, 2000; Gnyawali et al., 2008)

Each steps of competition process lead to important limits that competitors need to exceed. Thereby, the arrival of new members leads to a need of formalization and the appearance of opportunistic behaviors, which obliges to enhance formalization. Consequently, the construction of barriers to entry leads to structure an enclosing effect. Overcome this main limit (Astley and Fombrum, 1983; Bresser and Harl, 1986) is crucial to understand the success key factors of cooperation.

The cooperation literature suggested the relevance of temporal or spatial sharing (Gnyawali et al., 2008; Chen, 2008; Oliver, 2004; Clark et al., 2003; Bengtsson and Kock, 2000). Alliance strategy is instable by nature (Das and Teng, 2000) and cooperation too; the temporal sharing lead to the question of cooperation strategy longevity. The case study reveals how to stabilize the cooperation strategy and overcoming their limits.

The Pic Saint Loup competitive strategy highlights the possibility for members to cooperating with other external competitors or developing peripheral competitive project with internal competitors. This multiplication of cooperative strategies is driven by the need to overcome the main limit of enclosure.

The case study shows a process of multiplication that firms engage to overcome the limits of coopetition and the risk of instability. This multiplication process allows the continuity of competitive and collaborative relationships in same time. The continuity seems to stabilize the coopetition strategy and benefit from their competitive advantage in long term. The multiplication of coocompetitive strategies allows for a second level of analysis at the multi-coocompetitive level.

6. CONCLUSION

The case study confirms that coopetition evolve and lead coocompetitors to overcome important limits. Gradually, limits appear caused by, first, the increase of member, second, the formalization of the coopetition strategy. Then, the barriers to entry created an important limit that lead to a need of overcome them by developing peripheral coocompetitive strategies. Thus, firms combine several coocompetitive strategies involve in several analysis levels as the multi-coocompetitive level. At this level, tensions and complexity increase, leading to emergent risks of coherence lack and initial coocompetitive strategy weakening.

The original result of this study concerns the multiplication of coocompetitive strategies, as past research does not provide theoretical or empirical contributions on this point. The case study shows that despite the instability of coocompetitive strategies and the need of alternating or spatial sharing, a coocompetitive strategy could be stabilize over time as long as coocompetitors find flexibility outside. By the multiplication of coocompetitive, the competitive and collaborative relations could evolve without interruption and offers the maintaining of the coocompetitive strategy advantage in long term.

Despite a collaborative enhancement within, competition is necessary and expressed itself outside the initial coocompetitive strategy by sliding toward peripheral coocompetitive strategies. The case confirms that coocompetition isn't without tensions or risks but the process evolution lead to emergent risks and tensions that coocompetitors must overcome.

Very complex relationships arise in the situation of coocompetitive strategies multiplication, which requires a very complex management. None of past researches identified this phenomenon, which could explain the longevity of coopetition. The multi-coocompetitive level leads to the question of coocompetitor capacities to manage a complex portfolio of coocompetitive strategies. Those capacities will could explain part of the coocompetition success and, consequently, explain part of competitive success in 21st century business.

These results support the pursuit of empirical and dynamic analyzes of coopetition evolutions. We argue that an in-depth longitudinal case study is particularly adapted for a complex phenomenon analyze. Using the memory of coocompetitors, particularly cognition of firm directors involved, the case study of multiple partners in the context of SMEs is preferred. Indeed, the difficult access to secondary data pushes to collect primary data; the number of respondents makes the process of triangulation of the data. Moreover, instead of pregnant SMEs owner-managers have a double advantage because they directly define the SMEs strategy and they are directly involved in the coocompetitive process. Moreover, especially SMEs, with limited resources, must focus on the complementarities of coocompetitive strategies.

From a field practitioner's perspective, the Pic Saint-Loup case permits to identify emerging managerial limits to the cooperative process evolution and bring a means to overcome each of them. It identifies a set of cooperative strategies, indicating the tensions and the risks rising for each of them that managers may engage in function of various opportunities they offer. Overcome the main limit of cooperation is crucial to understand the key factors of cooperation success. This work allows recommending the pursuit of cooperation over time in order to sustainably benefit from the initial cooperative strategy advantages, while encouraging managers to seek external flexibility.

Our research, focus on one case study in the wine industry, presents some limitations. Future research could investigate others industries or others countries. For further research we propose to focus more on the New World perspective to include a comparative analysis.

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