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Full Length Article

Inter and intra organizational negotiation during economic recession: An essay on the promotion of cooperation

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Abstract

The difficult economic environment in which we live has created a reality rich in conflict within and between organizations. The economic tension and the highly conflictual environment combination have resulted in an increase of competitive strategies in negotiation. This approach has increased the level of business environment complexity. This article defends the opinion that in such a context cooperative negotiation strategies might present a solution to ease the tension and create a powerful sustainable competitive advantage. In this article we try to explain why it is natural for competitive strategies to dominate in organizations today. We also try to explain why cooperation is shying away. Yet the focus of our work is to highlight the possible ways to promote cooperation in this same context.

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Keywords: Cooperation; Organizational performance; Negotiation; Social dilemma; Negotiator's dilemma

Introduction

Over the last decades professionals around the world have been managing their business in a context of constant economic downturns and recessions, in the face of unprecedented economic challenges. Globalization has been the answer to many business problems, enabling the realization of economies of scale through the creation of interdependent economic networks between countries, organizations as well as individuals. The positive side of globalization is that organizations have increased their effectiveness and efficiency in the fields of production, assembly, distribution and shipment around the world, at better cost, enabling competitive product prices to maintain and expand their market share. However there is also a downside to this. For global risk analysts interconnectivity and increased impact on the environment, which are a result of globalization, have also produced despair. The Global Risk Report ([World Economic Forum, 2016](#)), based on the contributions of 750 experts mentions how climate change, cyber-dependence and severe income disparity are already impacting strained societies and leading to more competition for scarce resources. Globalization has compounded the types and levels of business risks.

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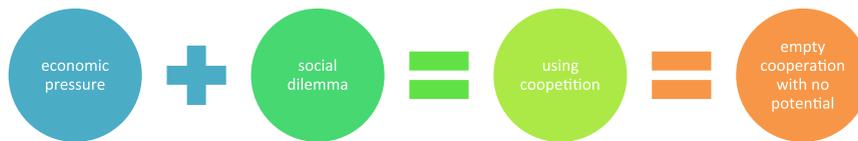


Fig. 1. The competition equation figure.

This new economic context has increased the pressure on the social dilemma with which managers are confronted. Should organizations cooperate for mutual and global posterity, or should they compete to ensure and maximize on their winnings in this particularly egoistic environment. Both sides of the equation seem very logical and debatable. What our review of literature shows is that in the face of this additional complexity, organizations have decided to cooperate competitively. Indeed, in the face of the economic pressure organizations cooperate through the creation of strategic alliances such as joint ventures, mergers, and acquisitions to increase their financial wealth, R&D potential, market access, and product portfolio. The aim of such cooperation might also be to minimize political and economic risk. Yet although they cooperate, organizations simultaneously compete to gain more than their partners from this cooperation. This has often been described as *coopetition*, a concept popularized by [Brandenburger and Nalebuff \(1996\)](#). Our belief is that it corresponds to a form of distorted cooperation, without any cooperative essence.

If we go back to the definition of cooperation in very simple words, we propose to frame it as follows: “I should deploy all my efforts to satisfy my needs then I will do all I can to help achieve satisfy yours (not at my expense, but through value creation).” ([Wheeler, 2003](#)). However today's organizations manage their cooperation in a way that we describe as follows: “I shall deploy all my effort to achieve my maximum potential ([Fig. 1](#)). As long as you are beneficial to me I will show a level of support and commitment, yet behind the scene I am getting ready to compete and win you over when and if needed”. We believe this corresponds to a distorted version of cooperation. It carries and delivers more competition than cooperation.

Our question thus becomes how to promote more “authentic” cooperation in this context. We address this question based on a review of the relevant literature and divide it into sub-questions. In part one, we ask why competitive strategies dominate in difficult economic conditions. In part two, given this context, we ask how organizations can make cooperation happen and identify the importance of individuals. In part three, we thus move from the organizational to the individual level. We thus ask how a negotiator can make the context more appropriate for cooperation.

Our research is conceptual in nature and is based on a review of literature. Relevant articles were identified using the following keywords: negotiation, competition, cooperation, social dilemma, negotiator's dilemma. First, the abstract of the articles identified were read and ranked as to their relevance to the theme of promoting negotiation between and within organizations. Articles which did not relate to business negotiation between and within organizations were not kept for further review. We read the articles we selected with our three sub questions in mind. The idea was to list the ideas that would enable us to answer our questions. We read articles until a stage where new articles did not bring new ideas but repeated ones we had already identified, giving us an indication that we had reached a point of saturation. For the more general articles on cooperation and negotiation, for each idea identified, we referred ourselves to the articles which were most cited and which were at the origin of the idea identified. For the articles which were more directly related to our questions (such as how to promote cooperation within organizations), not that many were identified and we did not have to exclude any.

Part I: Why competitive strategies dominate in difficult economic conditions?

A first answer to this question might be that resources are scarce. If one wins alone one might just make it. If one shares the resources, both parties will be both uncompetitive compared to others who choose not to cooperate. This corresponds to the essence of all social dilemma. However, we will show that pursuing this logic leads to situations in which all parties are worse off.

By definition: “*Social dilemmas are situations in which individual rationality leads to collective irrationality. This is, reasonable behavior leads to a situation in which everyone is worse off than they might have been otherwise.*”

Many of the most challenging problems we face, from the interpersonal to the international, are at their core social dilemmas” Kollock (1998).

For more explanations, Kollock continues by saying that: “All social dilemmas are marked by at least one deficient equilibrium. It is deficient in that there is at least one other outcome in which everyone is better off. It is equilibrium in that no one has an incentive to change their behavior. Thus, at their worst, social dilemmas exemplify the true meaning of tragedy: “the essence of dramatic tragedy” wrote Whitehead, “is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things”. A group of people facing a social dilemma may completely understand the situation, may appreciate how each of their actions contribute to a disastrous outcome, and still be unable to do anything about it. The most severe social dilemmas are also characterized by a dominating strategy that leads to a deficient equilibrium. A dominating strategy is a strategy that yields the best outcome for an individual regardless of what anyone else does. The compelling, and perverse, feature of these dilemmas is that there is no ambiguity about what one should do to benefit oneself, yet all are hurt if all follow this rational decision. However, not all social dilemmas involve dominating strategies”. (Kollock, 1998).

This explanation, when applied to the organizational context points to which extend social dilemmas can lead to under-efficient solutions. For instance when an individual in an organization uses a dominating strategy to yield the best individual outcome possible, regardless of its impact or consequence on the rest of the organization itself, this individual choice will leave everyone, including himself, worse off. As previously stated this could lead to: increased conflict, damaged relationship, poor organizational performance. Game theory is useful to understand this.

Dilemma Game illustrative example

Game theory is used to model a wide variety of economic settings. The choice settings in which economists apply game theory are generally small number settings in which individual decisions and welfare are interdependent. That is to say, in economic games each person's welfare depends, in part, on the decisions of the other individuals “in the game”. Again, the basic problem occurs when the pursuit of self-interest by each leads to a poor outcome for all. To elaborate we refer to the work by Axelrod (1984) “In the Prisoner Dilemma game, there are two players. Each has two choices, namely cooperate or defect. Each must make the choice without knowing what the other will do. No matter what the other does, defection yields a higher payoff than cooperation. The dilemma is that if both defect, both do worse than if both had cooperated. As illustrative example: A district attorney knows that two prisoners are indeed guilty of a crime, he doesn't have acceptable evidence to convince a jury. The alleged criminals know this. The district attorney presents the following choice problem to each of the prisoners separately. The prisoners are kept separated. Each is given the choice of not confessing or confessing. Game summarized Fig. 1. If neither confess = both cooperate, each will get a one year sentence, payoff = 3 for each. If one confesses = defect/cooperate, the confessor goes free, and the other is sentenced for 5 years, payoff = payer one gets 0, players 2 gets 5. If both confess = both defect, each will get three years, payoff = 1 for each”.

Fig. 2 shows us that you can maximize your individual gains only by competing against a cooperative person. It also states that the scenario of mutual cooperation is the best scenario for mutual satisfaction. However one need to be aware that if you initiate cooperation and that it is not reciprocated by the other you are defeated. Lack of information, or deceptive information and the uncertainty that ensues on what the other party will do (the two prisoners are not able to communicate with each other) plays a key role in yielding a suboptimal outcome.

The conclusion is thus that, in a competitive context, which leads to not sharing information, we do not cooperate well with one another. This happens even when economic problems occur globally and threaten the security of businesses around the world. So far the existing literature has focused on the idea of solving conflicts. According to Brubaker, Noble, Fincher, Kee-Young Park, and Press (2014), it has dealt with conflict coaching and cooperation, with mechanisms to reduce the costs of unresolved conflicts. Also according to these authors, government organizations have incorporated the role of ombudsman to assist in conflict management. However it has not directly dealt with the idea of promoting cooperation.

Nevertheless, it is our belief that answers lie not in solving conflicts once they occur but in preventing them by promoting cooperation in and within organizations. In other words the answer to global economic problem lies in what we chose to call “authentic” cooperation as defined above in the quote from Wheeler (2003). We now turn to the question of how to promote cooperation in organizations.

		Player one	
		Cooperate Not Confess	Defect Confess
Player two	Cooperate Not Confess	(1 year, 1 year) R= 3 R= 3 Reward for mutual cooperation	(5 years, 0 years) S=0, T= 5 Sucker payoff Temptation to defect
	Defect Confess	(0 years, 5, years) T=5, S= 0	(3 years, 3 years) P=1, P=1 Punishment for mutual defect

Fig. 2. Prisoner dilemma summary, Axelrod (1984).

Part II: How to make authentic cooperation happen in organizations?

Despite the conclusion that competitive strategies often dominate in periods of economic recession, scholars and practitioners alike have long recognized that cooperation is a key component of organizational success. Organizations themselves have long been conceptualized as systems of cooperative effort and coordinated activity (Barnard, 1938). While some researchers focus on individuals' motives for working together when they define cooperation (Mead, 1937), others also focus on relational behaviors, such as exchanging and combining information, ideas, and other resources; giving assistance or helping; constructively discussing problems and conflicts; and supporting and encouraging each other (Argyle, 1991; Tjosvold, 1998). Cooperation can be defined as a social behavior. When people cooperate, they act in ways that advance or potentially advance each other's interests. Sometimes they benefit personally, and sometimes they do not. Cooperation may fall within or extend beyond job roles (Tyler and Blader, 2000).

In these systems, leaders and members of work groups are judged by how well they cooperate to deliver the results organizations and their environments demand. Those who adeptly develop and help others to develop cooperative relationships are poised for success, as are the organizations that employ them. Yet, despite how important and rewarding cooperation can be in theory, evidence suggests that it continues to evade many organizations.

There is a clear and strong need for research illuminating “the conditions that give rise to naturally occurring cooperation” in organizations (Smith et al., 1995). Despite this our research of the existing literature on this question led us to identify very few relevant articles. The work by Deery and Iverson (2005) is a rare example of research that answers this need. They propose a simplified model (Fig. 2) of the organization as a set of systems and processes based on the study of 305 branches of a very unionized Australian banking corporation. Although it is focused on union-management relations and their impact on a cooperative labor relations climate, we believe it illustrates a more general case. There are numerous sources from which cooperation can naturally emerge in an organization. The antecedents of cooperation are listed in Fig. 2 and include, ensuring good relations, being open, having an integrative bargaining approach, believing in cooperation and ensuring good relations. The model also shows the existence of a link between the amounts of cooperation that takes place and positive outcomes in terms of organizational performance (productivity, quality of service, and decrease in the level of absenteeism). It is one of the very few articles which demonstrates a link between cooperation and organizational performances and which identifies which variables enable cooperation to exist.

In Fig. 3, the authors categorize three types of variables that can lead to cooperation. Management (Management Variables) is a source of cooperation if managers share information with transparency. Unions, by being more responsive and integrating also lead to fostering cooperation. The unions in this model could be replaced by customers, suppliers, distributors. For each of these different stakeholders conditions can also exist for the occurrence of cooperation and more research is needed as we have not identified articles which deal with the antecedents and consequences of cooperation with these stakeholders. The last category of variables in Fig. 2 is individual variables

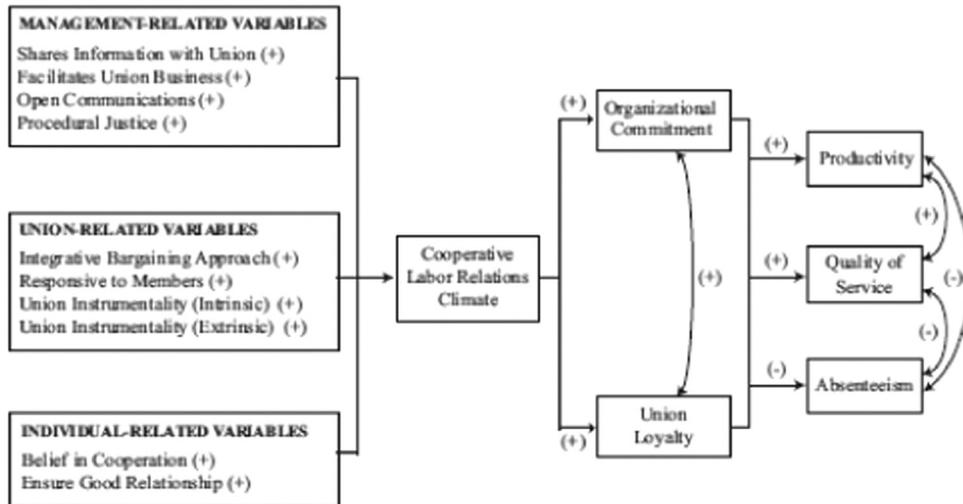


Fig. 3. Causal model of organizational performance, Deery and Iverson (2005).

and in this regard Allister (1995), based on a study of 194 managers and professionals identified that affect and cognition based trust played an important role in fostering cooperation.

It is thus with individuals that the choice to cooperate or not lies. For that reason part III will focus on how individuals could, acting as negotiators make cooperative choices or try to create more cooperative contexts.

Part III: How can the negotiator make the context more appropriate for cooperation?

When transferred to the field of negotiation a social dilemma is known as a negotiator's dilemma.

Based on the literature in negotiation a negotiator will either creating value or claim value. To relate this to the negotiator's dilemma we need to explain that *"In the value-creating view negotiators work primarily to increase the available resources, to find joint gains or "win-win" solutions, wherein all the parties will benefit. Negotiators must act cooperatively, and successful negotiators are open and creative. They share information, communicate clearly, maintain a cooperative attitude and focus on developing common interests"* (Lax and Sebenius, 1986). On the other hand *"In the value-claiming view negotiators work primarily to claim the largest share of the disputed goods. To be successful negotiators must engage in hard bargaining; they must "start high, concede slowly, exaggerate the value of concessions, minimize the benefits of the other's concessions, conceal information, argue forcefully on behalf of principles that imply favorable settlements, make commitments to accept only highly favorable agreements, and be willing to outwait the other fellow."* (Lax and Sebenius, 1986).

In order to solve the dilemma by promoting the choice of cooperation, when such a choice is relevant, the literature indicates that this question is linked to the concept of framing.

To review this concept we have focused our work on the most cited authors in the field of negotiation. We found two interesting opposing framing perspectives. Authors have either looked at it from a positive framing perspective asking "how to promote cooperation". Or from a negative framing perspective asking "how to overcome cooperation vulnerabilities (which may be the reason behind why people do not cooperate). Table 1 identifies which authors are linked with which framing perspective. Table 2 sums up their recommendations.

Let us look deeper into this content. In order to do this, we compared and contrasted the recommendations of the authors and identified, using their own terminology, the list of variables that were the most repeated across time. This is summarized in Table 3.

Let us now look at each variable in Table 3.

The first variable in the table is reciprocity which could be reworded as "give and take". The variable stresses out that by initiating cooperation, your opponent will be invited to return cooperation. An example from the literature to illustrate this is "the shadow of the future". It means that during a business transaction, the negotiator will highlight the fact that this is not a hit and run operation. He will insist, on the contrary, that he (his company) has the intention

Table 1
Positive and negative framing analysis.

Scope	Positive framing
How to promote cooperation?	
Axelrod (1984)	
Fisher and Ury (1981)	
Basadur, Pringle, Speranzini, and Bacot (2000)	
Buskens and Jeroen (2000)	
Scope	Negative framing
How to overcome cooperation vulnerabilities?	
Lax and Sebenius (1986)	
Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991)	
Abell and Reyniers (2000)	
Raub and Jeroen (2000)	
Hegselmann and Andreas (2000)	
Edk Group (2000)	

to make this business opportunity a long term partnership. This should elicit from the other side a cooperative attitude to ensure good will from his side.

The second variable is education to negotiation: the authors stress the need to incorporate cooperative values in the education systems to install them in individual behaviors more naturally. Of course the younger the age at which the value is introduced, the most integrated it will be. Nonetheless, via professional education adults can also be taught the value and importance of cooperation for a more conscious choice (Soliman, Stimec, & Antheaume, 2014).

The third variable is to consider negotiation as a process. This should help individuals evaluate the input, the output and their performance. If done properly, individuals will be able to control better their performance and increase cooperation strategy choices.

The fourth variable is strategy re-invention. It consists in the redeployment of certain strategies in a different way to insist on obtaining cooperation. An example is the exit strategy. You can exit competitively to create pressure but you can also exit to avoid competition, and to insist on cooperation.

The fifth variable is the value of relationship. As stressed by many authors, when the relationship is important, a cooperative strategy is not a choice but rather a must. To keep and nurture a long term relationship, cooperation is the only available road. Competitive behavior ruins relationships. So for example, through socialization and building networks the value of the relationship that will result should bond both parties to a cooperative negotiation.

Reading in between the lines, we found that there is an implicit message as to why people do not negotiate cooperatively. The cause seems to be lack of knowledge, as shown in Table 4. With more education there should be more cooperation.

Thus, under different titles and wordings the authors mentioned in Table 4 emphasize the impact of negotiation knowledge on the management of the negotiator's dilemma. Has this hypothesis been tested? Are there any clear results that indicates that with more negotiation education individuals tend to behave more cooperatively in organizational setting leading to better organization results?

We found evidence of this in a study conducted in the United States by Heydenberk et al. (2003), in which ten groups of elementary school students were trained in integrated (i.e. cooperative) resolution conflict strategies, alongside with their teachers. The ten groups were compared with eight witness groups which took no training. The research was conducted over a period of five years. The effects of the students' moral reasoning abilities were measured for the ten groups and compared with the eight witness groups. The research concluded that there was a significant improvement in the students' moral reasoning abilities.

In the field of management Soliman et al. (2014) report on the follow-up of a group of 64 managers over 6 months, prior, during and after negotiation training, and on the prolonged follow-up of a subset of 11 people from the larger group of 64, over 12 more months. They identify that people who manage to reduce the gap between how they are perceived and how they see themselves do benefit from the training. They learn to better analyze the context of a

Table 2
How to make the context more appropriate for cooperation.

	Authors	Recommendations
1	Axelrod (1984)	The shadow of the future Exchanging gains Teach individual to take care one another Teach reciprocity Increase the capacity of appreciation
2	Lax and Sebenius (1986)	Choice of negotiation philosophy Breaking up the process and channeling it toward cooperation Invoking repeated dealings Making cooperation norms salient Socialization
3	Fisher and Ury (1981)	Separate people from the problem Focus on interest not position Invent options for mutual gain Insist upon objective evaluation criteria
4	Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1991)	Don't react See the problem from their side Re-frame the negotiation Build a bridge Bring him to his sense, not his knees
5	Basadur et al. (2000)	The Simplex Process for cooperation generation: it's a three-phase process of creative problem solving and innovative thinking that helps you solve complex problems. Process skills enhancement: that is the system recognizes that everyone is creative and that everyone contributes to the creative process in different ways
6	Axelrod (2000)	Six new tested variables to promote cooperation in the PD paradigm, building on the "Theory of Cooperation": Timing of choices; Abell and Reyniers, 2000 Hostage; Raub and Jeroen, 2000 Social Network; Buskens and Jeroen, 2000 Adaptive Play; Hegselmann and Andreas, 2000 Envy; Lahno, 2000 Exit; Edk Group, 2000

negotiation and they are more likely to choose a cooperative strategy when it is appropriate. However, to the best of our knowledge this is the only direct investigation in the field of management of how an increase in knowledge can help negotiators chose a cooperative strategy.

As a conclusion, the evidence available to us indicates clearly that improving the quality of negotiation training and monitoring its impact would certainly help promote cooperation within and between organizations. However, the amount of literature related to this question is relatively scarce. More research in that field is needed to provide a body of knowledge on what type of negotiation training is the most impactful.

Table 3
A review of variables to act on, in order to increase cooperation.

	Variables	Authors	Example
1	Reciprocity	Axelrod (1984) Lax and Sebenius (1986) Abell and Reyniers (2000) Buskens and Jeroen (2000)	The shadow of the future Evoking repeated deals Hostage Social Network
2	Negotiation Education	Axelrod (1984) Lax and Sebenius (1986) Basadur et al. (2000)	Teaching individuals the value of the other Teaching individuals the norms of cooperation Teaching the cooperation norm
3	Negotiation as a Process	Lax and Sebenius (1986) Basadur et al. (2000)	Breaking up the process and channel it toward cooperation The Simplex process
4	Strategy re-invention	Axelrod (1984) Lax and Sebenius (1986) Fisher and Ury (1981) Fisher et al. (1991) Edk Group (2000)	Moderate and Sophisticated Envy strategies Exit Strategy
5	Value of Relationship	Axelrod (1984) Lax and Sebenius (1986) Fisher and Ury (1981) Fisher et al. (1991) Buskens and Jeroen. (2000)	The appreciation of the other Socialization Building the other a bridge Social Network

Table 4
Why people do not cooperate, a review of literature.

	Why do people not cooperate	
1	Axelrod (1984)	Individuals have not been taught the value of the other, as well as reciprocity concept
2	Lax and Sebenius (1986)	Individuals have not been taught of the norm of cooperation
3	Fisher and Ury (1981) Fisher et al. (1991)	People don't know better than to compete, in other words people can be taught to cooperate
4	Basadur et al. (2000)	This does not say why people do not cooperate. Negotiation is a thinking process that not only can be taught, but has to be. And with increase complexity in negotiation there is an increase need of knowledge
5	Tenberger (2001)	People compete as a result of lack of knowledge
6	Moore and Chapman-Moore (1989)	Learning process plays a vital role in negotiation, but it is often neglected
7	Lipman (1986)	Cooperation results of a level of awareness, knowledge.
8	Simon (1982)	Increase knowledge...increases negotiators rationality to deliver better choices
9	Lax and Sebenius (1986)	Players cooperate when they know.

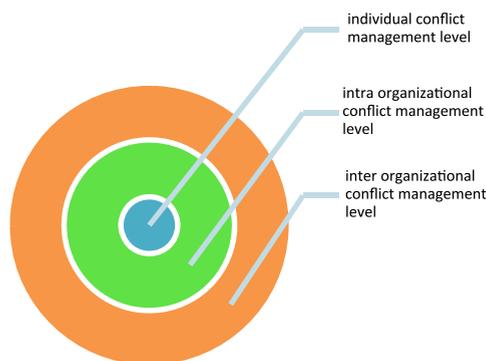


Fig. 4. The three levels of conflict management.

Conclusion

In this article we moved from the inter-organizational level to the intra-organizational one and then we were led to emphasize the importance of the individual level.

This led us to the belief that although the organization and its environment can be a source for conflict, it is only “managed” positively or negatively at the individual level. The individual is at the heart of action in conflict management (Fig. 4). It all depends on “his” or “her” capacity to reach agreement with the “other” during conflict, in such a context.

To conclude, in times of severe economic struggle the social dilemma becomes more visible and the impact of individuals in the performance of organizations becomes more critical. As conflict increases, cooperation needs to increase. This can only happen when negotiation education is delivered to all the people in the organization as a tool for: sharing information, developing relationship management, performance management and, if need be, conflict management. Only when this will happen on massive scale will “authentic” cooperation take place in and between organizations, enabling a better collective performance for the global economy.

This plea for more education in the field of negotiation reinforces our emphasis on the role of individuals. This decision to promote education in the field of negotiation lies in the hand of individuals, this time business leaders.

Of course the main limitation of this article is that it is based on a review of literature. The need that we mentioned in part II, for more research illuminating “*the conditions that give rise to naturally occurring cooperation*” in organizations (Smith et al., 1995) still remains to be answered.

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