
Editorial: Multi-organisational designs revisited

Christoph Lattemann

School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS),
Jacobs University Bremen,
Campus Ring 1, 28759 Bremen, Germany
Fax: +49 (0) 421-200-330
E-mail: c.lattemann@jacobs-university.de

Claudia Loebbecke*

Department of Business, Media and Technology Management,
University of Cologne,
Pohligstr. 1, 50969 Koeln, Germany
Fax: +49-221-470-5300
E-mail: claudia.loebbecke@uni-koeln.de
*Corresponding author

Biographical notes: Christoph Lattemann is a Professor for Business Administration and Information Management at Jacobs University Bremen and a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University. He has published seven books as well as numerous book chapters, conference papers and peer-reviewed article in journals such as *Management International Review (MIR)*. His major research focus is on international management and corporate governance. Previously, he worked at Deutsche Börse AG, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and Potsdam University. Teaching and research brought him to Stanford University and Copenhagen Business School. He is a member of various review boards and professional associations and consults governmental institutions and companies.

Claudia Loebbecke holds the Chair of Media and Technology Management at the University of Cologne. Previously, she worked at INSEAD, McKinsey, Erasmus University, and Copenhagen Business School. Research stays brought her to INSEAD, UNSW, HKUST, Sloan School/MIT, Bentley University, LSE, LUISS and University of Paris-Dauphine. From 2005–2006, she was the elected President of the Association for Information Systems (AIS). She has published over 170 peer-reviewed papers and is listed among the first 25 researchers for eight top IS journals (2005 to 2009). She holds several editorial positions and is a member of the European Academy of Sciences and of Beta Gamma Sigma.

Globalisation, market deregulation, shorter product life cycles, the pressure to constantly innovate, and the need to follow customers require businesses to decentralise, distribute work, collaborate with stakeholders and establish new organisational structures. Multi-organisational designs such as network organisations, virtual organisations, platform organisations and open source or online communities, which cope with these challenging hyper-competitive business environments, have been analysed in the past 30 years.

Concepts for business partner integration in multi-organisational ecosystems have been discussed since the emergence of electronic material requirement planning systems to support operations in supply chains in the 1970s. In business-to-business contexts, research has emphasised general concepts in business-to-business networks such as cooptation and the open innovation helping businesses to solve their pressing problems, capture dispersed and fast-changing knowledge, highlight and leverage expertise, generate and refine ideas, and manage, govern, and actively maintain inter- and intra-organisational collaboration. Especially since the 1990s, proper governance and trust building among partners have been identified as core requirements for performance-driven multi-organisational design. In business-to-consumer environments, the research has focused on the changing role of the customer as a 'prosumer', mass customisation, lead user – and customer integration concepts. Now, with this special issue, we take the opportunity to follow up on these issues and revise the existing philosophies and approaches.

In the first paper of this special issue, Marc Nissen addresses some longstanding discussions in literature on the inherent dynamics in multi-organisational ecosystems and the need to conceptualise a 'dynamic fit'. Drawing analogues to the research field of engineering, especially to aerodynamics, he argues that static stability, dynamic stability, and manoeuvrability apply to both, airplanes and multi-organisational ecosystems and postulates that solutions for airplanes can be transferred to multi-organisational ecosystems. Nissen elaborates on the existing trade-off between stability and manoeuvrability and illuminates the enabling role of technology for moderating interrelations. Based on the case of the Indian Ocean disaster in 2004, where thousands of organisations were involved, he shows that even with the best intention and with an altruistic motivational background of the actors, in many multi-organisational ecosystems collaboration and competition co-exist, possibly resulting in overall low performing outcomes.

As Michel Avital and Baldev Singh show in the second paper of this special issue, collaboration and competition may, however, lead to high group performance in terms of innovation if implemented and managed properly. They focus on the relation between competition and collaboration in teams and the consequences for group performances. Avital and Singh demonstrate that enhanced competition tends to jeopardise collaboration and vice versa. They analyse the influence of intra-team collaboration and competition on project performance by researching 176 IT projects. Avital and Singh find that intra-team collaboration has a strong and broad positive influence on project performance and group innovativeness. Intra-team competition has a negative effect on team performance. The impact on team performance is limited in environments where competition and collaboration co-exists (cooptation). However, the co-existence of competition and collaboration leads to a positive impact on the degree of innovativeness of group solutions.

In the third paper of this special issue, Paris Chrysos addresses a new organisational design to enable open innovation, where business partners, competitors and customers are working together to generate new ideas. The specific organisational design is an open platform where representatives from different organisations jointly discuss and experiment with ideas in a bar-like environment; it is called Barcamp. The Barcamp approach combines several characteristics of different, already existing organisational designs and innovation approaches. The paper specifically investigates how such ad hoc organised Barcamps are governed; how do innovative topics come up; how is labour

divided; and how do learning processes evolve? Chrysos analyses 16 Barcamps with over 1,200 participants and addresses the need for active monitoring and social networking.

Heikki Lempinen and Virpi Kristiina Tuunainen, in the fourth paper of the special issue, present an action design research project which focuses on trust, a pivotal characteristic of all the above mentioned networks. They analyse environments where the shared information is perceived as a source of competitive advantage for each single network partner, who has a specific role in such a network and hence acts as an agent for other network partners. Resulting agency and trust problems and the accompanying information asymmetries call for effective governance mechanisms. Lempinen and Tuunainen outline solutions to overcome the relevant trust issues in business collaborations by means of information technologies. They point out how efficient and effective inter-organisational processes and IT-systems are to be designed and implemented.

In brief, this special issue raises strategic matters such as the alignment of networks in dynamic environments and the balance between competition and collaboration in business ecosystems. It touches upon operational concerns such as the organisational settings of creative environments and the implementation of trust. Each of the four papers raises relevant questions with regard to pressing and contemporary issues for academics as well as for practitioners in the field of organisational design and engineering for inter-organisational collaboration and competition. We very much hope that you will enjoy the reading.