



## THE PROPOSAL OF MODEL FOR BUILDING COOPERATION MANAGEMENT IN COMPANY

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**Abstract.** The goal of the article is to use detailed literature analysis and findings of an empirical research, and to propose model for building cooperation management in a company. The article brings a valuable tool to company managers in a form of a complex and detailed model to achieve successful implementation of cooperation management in a company. The article thus provides a tool for company managers for managing their cooperation projects and activities. Use of this tool is meant to help minimize occurrence of conflict situations and to support smooth progress of cooperation activities.

**Keywords:** cooperation, cooperative management, implementation, company, research, model.

**JEL Classification:** M10, M13, M14.

### Introduction

The topic of managing cooperation activities is currently highly up to date. In present, cooperation as such represents for a company an important tool for increasing its competitiveness. Companies aim to fully utilize their cooperation potential. In order to be successful, it is needed to effectively manage these activities and to dynamically react to the ongoing market development.

The process of implementation of cooperation management is influenced by a number of factors including theoretical concepts as well as practical applications. Probably the most significant challenge lies in the fact that there is no universal model available for implementation of cooperation management in a company.

After conducting interviews with several companies as a part of the performed empirical research, we have identified a distinct need among the managers for a model that would support their efforts to build and implement cooperation management within their organizations. Such a

model would represent benefit not only to the managers of the company but also to their partners.

The article aims to offer, in an understandable form, a coherent perspective on the management of cooperation activities in a company as well as a methodology of managing its cooperation projects. Both of these would be based on a comprehensive mapping of theoretical and practical findings in the area of cooperation management as well as the performed research about its utilization in Slovak enterprises.

### 1. Objective and methodology

The main goal of this article is to gather and accumulate new insights in the area of cooperation management and to highlight possible ways of how it can be effectively established, built and implemented within a company. The proposed model is meant to be used by the company managers as a valuable tool for building and implementing cooperation management within a company.

In order to address the points in question, as set by this article, it was necessary to use several methods, depending on and fitting to the character of the individual parts of the solution. In order to accumulate necessary data, we used the method of document analysis (for analysis of current as well as historical data about the topic), a questionnaire method and a method of semi-structured interview (gathering data in an empirical research) and a method of observation (used during visits of selected companies).

For data processing we used mainly quantitative evaluation (statistical methods) and the method of comparison (comparison of the data obtained from the empirical research and the data from the analysis of secondary sources).

The performed research focused on medium and large enterprises active in the Slovak Republic. In total, 273 respondents took part in the research focused on diagnostics of the level of use of cooperation management.

Research included companies active in multiple sectors of the Slovak economy. Included companies were categorized by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as medium or large enterprises. The actual respondents were company managers on the mid to top management level within the managerial hierarchy of companies. Size of the sample was 345 respondents, with the required 95% interval of reliability and the maximum allowable error of 5%. Since 273 respondents actually took part in the research, the maximum allowable error reached 5.72%. Data was gathered exclusively via personal interview.

The methods used for further data processing were induction, deduction, synthesis (in identification of key success factors for building cooperation management and in formulation of particular steps of the proposed model), abstraction and modelling.

## 2. The current state of dealing with the issue

We have identified ongoing scientific discussion about the term cooperation management and its area of use. This has resulted in several definitions of cooperation management that are in use and that we encountered during the review of scientific literature. However, these definitions typically cover only a certain subpart of the overall role of cooperation management. High variability in interpretation of the term can be supported by the following examples. Lafleur (2005) understands cooperation management as a way of managing and developing collaboration in a competitive environment. According to Ray (2002), cooperation management represents a term for integrated management of company networks. Staatz (1983) sees cooperation management as cooperative decision making within heterogeneous preferences. He highlights the need for a model of cooperation based on a defined group choice. Table 1 summarizes the definitions of the term cooperation management.

Veerakumaran (2006) summarized the most important characteristics of cooperation management into the following points:

- Cooperation management is a complex decision making process and the decisions are made on all managerial levels.
- Primary goal of cooperation management is to satisfy the needs of the members of cooperation.
- All activities need to occur according to the agreed principles of management and cooperation.
- Suitable balance needs to be established between the efforts for commercial success and maintaining goals of the cooperating parties.
- Management focused on reaching a goal via effective use of resources.

Based on the performed detailed analysis, as described above, we can define a more precise definition of this term:

Cooperation management is effective and efficient management of relationships in a cooperation between separate and relatively independent organizations or individuals, with the goal of improving their competitiveness (Soviar 2012; Vodák *et al.* 2013).

In the analysis of scientific literature we also looked at indications of the key success factors of building cooperation management in a company.

Building of relationships based on cooperation and having the following attributes (Ramanauskienė, Ramanauskas 2006; Lydeka, Adomavičius 2007; Malakauskaite, Navickas 2010, 2011; Gumilar *et al.* 2011): Cooperation and partnership; Seriousness; Non-disturbance of mutual competitive relationships; Focusing particularly on long-term time horizons – long-term cooperation.

To build cooperation management in a company is a real challenge that company managers need to deal with. There is a number of factors that influence the process of establishing cooperation management.

Sahut and Peris-Ortiz (2014) emphasized the role of innovations in the process of building cooperation management in a company. They consider it essential to create a favorable environment for entrepreneurship and innovations. Such environment is often characterized by determination and close relationship between the cooperating parties.

Another important factor for building cooperation management is trust between the partner organizations. Of particular importance is the gradual adaptation of business cultures of the partner companies (Weck, Ivanova 2013). The need for informational background for cooperation processes is listed by Monczka *et al.* (1998). To enable effective management of cooperation processes, it is necessary to ensure quality information within the company and to enable its sharing for the decision making needs of the managers. Effective work with information within cooperation can help to prevent conflicts as well as to enable dealing

with challenging cooperation activities. Importance of organizational factors for building cooperation management was emphasized by Jassawalla and Sashittal (1998). These involve changes in the organizational structure to support cooperation, interested and support of top management of the partner companies, openness to changes while maintaining mutual goals of the partners.

Assuming that the abovementioned identified factors are taken care of within a company, then its cooperation management will bring expected results, such as better

product quality, shorter delivery times and higher customer satisfaction (Valenzuela, Villacorta 1999).

Based on the performed analysis and evaluation of various approaches to managing company cooperation activities, as presented by multiple authors, we are able to proceed to systematization of these findings. Here we provide a summary of the main contributions of each approach to managing cooperation activities. These represent a basis of the proposal of model for building cooperation management in a company (Table 2).

Table 1. Definitions of the term cooperation management

Author(s)	Definition
Rosenfeld (1996)	Cooperation management is an emerging approach to industrial competitiveness. Cooperative behavior will help SMEs firms compete, and therefore the goal is to alter the behavior of enterprises and to facilitate cooperation.
Hanna and Walsh (2002)	It is trend of inter-working among small firms. It needs to evolve into a mechanism to enable small firms to develop innovative products and processes jointly. Small firms may have to rethink their approach to cooperation and their motives for initiating inter-working if they are to benefit fully from cooperation.
Brown (1998)	Cooperation management may be a simple partnership arrangement between government and industry, or it may be a much more complex relationship wherein government actually transfers authority over the management of the resource to industry, community or regional users.
Davis (1999)	Cooperation management is the part of the cooperative community professionally engaged to support the whole cooperative membership in the achievement of the cooperative purpose.
Oludimu and Adedoyin (1996)	Cooperation management is also directed towards the three (3) Es of management, viz, Efficiency; Effectiveness; and Economy. Cooperation management is responsible for the daily operations of the organizations.
Tipa and Welch (2006)	Cooperation management is based on the interaction between equal partners in decision-making, where each group retains its distinct identity and independence throughout the process.
Zhang (2011)	Cooperation management is a core of all management problems. Cooperation management provides conditions of constructing a cooperation system. These conditions are the motivation of resource dependence, objective of effect enhancement, constraints of encouraging cooperation and possession of technology of cooperation.

Table 2. Summary of the contributions of individual approaches to managing company cooperation activities

Author(s)	Emphasis	Contribution
Ritala and Sainio (2014)	Determination and close collaboration between cooperating parties	Application of the business model
Mustak (2014), Kultti (2011)	Creation of cooperation networks	Application to the area of innovation of services
Felzensztein <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Portfolio of the areas of collaboration and its gradual expansion	Application to marketing activities and innovations
Wicks <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Company performance	Cooperation process based on trust
Fawcett <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Correct understanding of trust	Dynamics of trust building in cooperation
Biggiero (2006)	reaction of knowledge	Use in managing critical activities
Szekely (2008)	Specifics of the region	Taking into consideration specifics of the region when establishing cooperations
Kowalski and Marcinkowski (2014)	Motivation for starting a cooperation	Main motivation = existing market potential within the regional economy
Nemcová (2004)	Uniqueness of cooperation	Influence of the uniqueness in managing a cooperation
Perry (2007)	Process of control	Establishing suitable metrics
Staber (2010)	Imitation within cooperation	Behavior of partners
Schmoltzi and Wallenburg (2012)	Organizational and strategic complexity in building cooperation management	Efficient planning of cooperation activities

### 3. Situation in Slovak enterprises – results of the empirical research

Between September 2012 and February 2013 we conducted a research, with the primary goal to gather and interpret information about the level of use of cooperations in the environment of Slovak enterprises. The main goal of the research was to identify the key aspects of efficient management and functioning of cooperations, related issues, degree of satisfaction of companies within cooperation and the opportunities for improvement of already functioning cooperations. Data that was gathered provided complete picture about readiness of Slovak enterprises to use (implement) cooperation management. In total, 273 managers of small, medium and large enterprises took part in the

Table 3. Level of use of cooperation management in Slovak enterprises

Researched area	Main results
Area of the most developed cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Supplier relationships (68.13%)</li> <li>– Purchasing relationships (52.38%)</li> <li>– Technical cooperation (44.32%)</li> <li>– Education (35.16%)</li> <li>– Advertising and promotion (24.18%)</li> </ul>
Main issues arising when cooperating with other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Insufficient adherence to the agreed contractual terms (58.39%)</li> <li>– Financially demanding (35.04%)</li> <li>– Distortion of information (34.41%)</li> <li>– Low effectiveness of cooperation (29.56%)</li> <li>– Unwillingness to provide internal information by a cooperating company, i.e. concerns about providing internal information to a company (28.83%).</li> </ul>
Main benefits resulting from cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Good mutual relations (26.62%)</li> <li>– Improved profit (20.78%)</li> <li>– Reduced costs (20.13%)</li> <li>– Improved competitiveness (15.58%)</li> </ul>
Areas for improvement in cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improved communication (31.78%)</li> <li>– Adherence to contractual terms (23.08%)</li> <li>– Improved effectiveness of cooperation (22.14%)</li> </ul>

research, from companies active in Slovak republic. Data from the respondents was gathered via personal interviews. Table below provides overview of the main results for the individual researched areas.

Managers had a list of key success factors related to the use of cooperation management in a company at their disposal. Managers were asked to assign the level of importance to the listed success factors, i.e. to express their priorities. The managers put the highest priority on the factor of mutual trust (9.35) and adherence to contractual terms (9.35), followed by the impact of cooperation (8.94). In contrast, managers assigned low priority to the level of communication (8.52) and even more significantly to the information system (7.62).

Representatives of the companies included in the research had also the opportunity to comment on the factors that they consider important (or unimportant) for the process of selection of a potential partner company. They expressed their opinion on the scale from 1 to 10, with 1 representing an “unimportant” factor and 10 representing an “extremely important” factor. As shown in Figure 1 below, when representatives of the selected companies consider collaboration with another company or an organization, they mostly look at the partner’s position on the market, certification, references, profitability, insolvency and potential costs of future cooperation. A legal form of the partner is the company attribute with the lowest importance.

### 4. Model for building cooperation management

The model for building cooperation management in a company should comprise the sources of information, concepts as well as the resources necessary for implementation, building and support of cooperation relationships. Based on that, the main goals of this model are as follows:

- to build successful and trouble-free cooperation management in a company,
- to establish and build long term relationships with partners,
- to improve the ability of a company to attract and sustain cooperation,

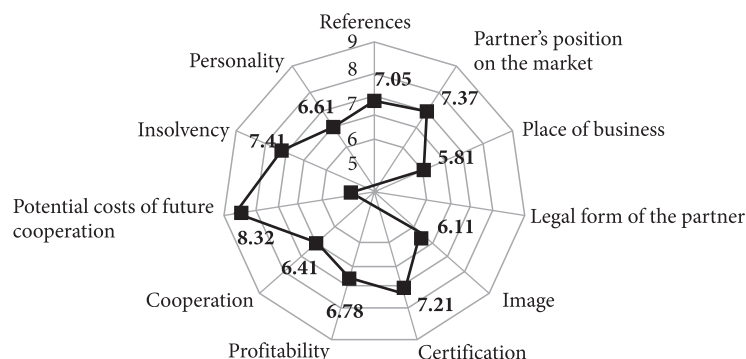


Fig. 1. Key factors taken into account when considering potential collaboration

- to achieve improved information flows in a company,
- to reduce loses of partners,
- to gain the improved access to information about the market and competition,
- to improve satisfaction and loyalty of partners (exceed expectations) gradually,
- to increase commercial activities with new partners,
- to lower the costs of cooperation (efficient and performing operations),
- to maximize cooperation opportunities (services available, references etc.),
- to identify inefficient cooperation processes,
- to achieve long term profitability and competitiveness.

The model for building cooperation management in a company connects managing of cooperation relationships, creating and managing of cooperation activities and utilization of relationship management.

Cooperation management integrates new strategic initiatives of partner communication and creates a common communication platform. The use of the management theory and the relationship management for creating of a model of cooperation management is definitely necessary. This is due to the fact that managing of relationships with partners is not only a matter of representing a relationship but an important part of supporting the understanding of management and development of relationships and communication.

When creating the model for building cooperation management in a company, it is necessary to select the structural (construction) components of the model so that they demonstrate that it is still a model but also they would ensure its implementation. By the fact that we have constructed a theoretical model, we gave a priority to the functionality and implementation as opposed to the strategy of creation, but without the actual elimination of this strategy.

In order for the proposed model to function successfully, it is necessary to ensure balance and integration of technology, processes and people. These aspects are closely related

to the company strategy, technology and integration processes in a company as well as to the orientation towards cooperation.

In relation to the opinions of multiple authors active in the field of creating a model of cooperation management in a company, we propose the model comprising the following major elements (Fig. 2):

1. Evaluation of the initial situation
2. Creation of the cooperation strategy
3. Formation of cooperation management
4. Definition of the position of the company and its employees within the cooperation
5. Establishing of continuous information flows
6. Creation of a company system for work with cooperation ideas, opportunities and relationships
7. Implementation of organizational changes
8. Implementation of changes in mindsets
9. Management of cooperation processes
10. Cooperation performance evaluation

As part of implementation planning of cooperation management, it is important to clearly define goals of the project and to define a model of metrics. These should enable monitoring, control and evaluation of the effects of the project, enable determining responsibility for project results and, last but not least, enable company to determine a timeframe for evaluation of the project success. Also, as part of the cooperation management planning, the company should identify a top management member who will ensure necessary managerial and financial support for the duration of the whole project. The next step is to appoint a project leader and to create a group of project users. It is important that the whole process of cooperation management implementation is planned in detail. Cooperation strategy needs to stem from the company strategy. Within the strategy, the model of managing cooperation relationships should be defined, including the model of cooperation processes, description of architecture for particular processes and their information ties and technological, practical and data integration, i.e. ties to the surrounding company environment.

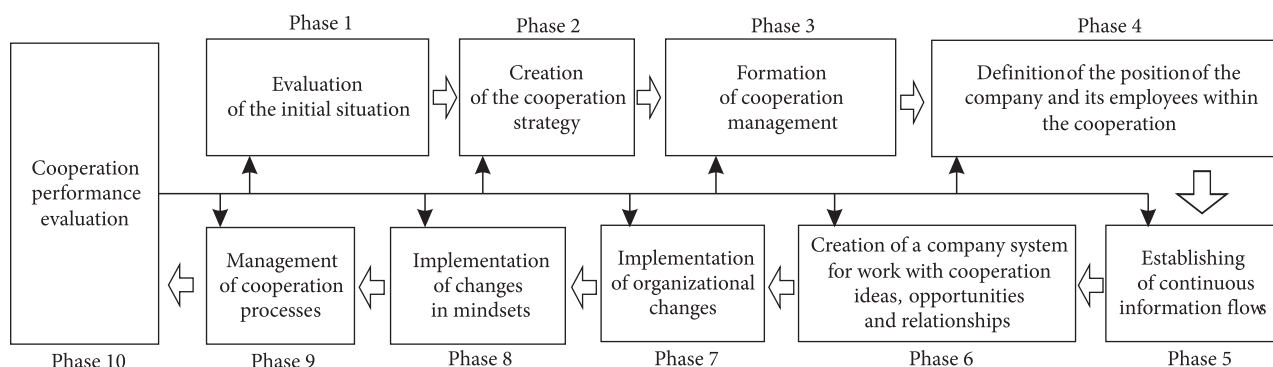


Fig. 2. Model for building cooperation management in a company

Before the company actually takes the first steps in building of cooperation management, it is essential to conduct a detailed and thorough analysis of processes related to the cooperation. The company could take advantage of a tool “map of cooperation processes conditions”, within which we distinguish three types of processes. These are disconnected processes, processes in a pragmatic phase and integrated processes. The goal of such analysis would be to evaluate the necessity to revise the current processes. In general, the company ought to strive for minimization of disconnected processes or towards their conversion into integrated processes. The performed analysis should be based on the opinions of partners and key employees who share certain relevance to the missing processes related to cooperation. At this stage, it is crucial that the top management is also involved in order to ensure execution of the required changes. Priority should be assigned to the missing processes and a plan should be drafted so that these processes can be established. Identification of processes related to cooperation constitutes a basic and necessary requirement for successful building of cooperation management within a company. Last step is evaluation of cooperation performance. Within this step is evaluated the management of cooperation itself. There are two crucial elements considering this evaluation. First one: It is necessary that this evaluation will be carried out on a regular basis. Second one: It is necessary that evaluation findings will be appropriately incorporated into the whole process (considering also the previous steps). Following the above is our proposed model based on systematic improvement (considering the evaluation feedback). An organization (companies, public offices, etc.) could learn following the procedure of established cooperation and thus improve its management.

## 5. Discussion

Before the building of cooperation management in a company actually starts, an audit of current situation should be performed. The audit would comprise identification and analysis of employees’ skills, incorrect decisions, failures, competition, partners and company needs related to the implementation of the cooperation management:

- the analysis of the environment (external analysis – the environment outside the company),
- the analysis within the company (internal analysis – the structure inside the company).

The analysis should focus especially on the following four aspects: the environment and market, internal company processes, information flows within the company, information systems used in the company.

Cooperation strategy represents a sum of strategic decisions that are used as a basis for implementing of cooperation management in a company. Further decisions about the

need to innovate cooperation relationships of the company are based on the cooperation strategy. However, this decision is considered only in the case that the current condition of cooperation relationships does not correspond with the desired state of things. Creation of the cooperation strategy focuses on the following key issues:

- What is the current situation in the company like and what does the company aim to reach by its activities?
- Who are target partners of the company and how should they be involved in the company’s cooperation activities?

The cooperation strategy needs to be aligned with the company strategy and other partners. The main role of the cooperation strategy is to select partners and to define their characteristics, cooperation opportunities and areas of potential cooperation. However, before that it is needed to perform a thorough analysis of current and potential partners and consequently to select the most suitable structure.

In the model, the element of a partner is a central piece and bears significant importance for full functioning of the model. This element accentuates the need to create a concept of cooperation management in a company. This means that the company needs to have an action plan ready defining how it will act in relation to its partners. It needs to designate the methods using which the relationships will be built and how the communication among partners will be carried out. The company should have the following processes ready, drafted and detailed:

- creation of cooperation activities according to the needs of partners,
- establishing of cooperation relationships with partners using suitable managerial communication,
- processing and evaluation of cooperation activities (initiatives),
- development of cooperation relationships with partners.

Company employees should think about the ways that they can contribute to the improvement of cooperation relationships. These components of the model act as a system for maintaining functionality of the whole cooperation management. In it, employees prepare the analysis of a situation, formulate cooperation strategy and action steps and define control mechanisms for efficiency and effectiveness.

It is necessary to keep company employees and partners informed. The company employees are very sensitive to the ongoing changes that happen as a result of implementation of cooperation management and execution of cooperation activities. In order for the employees to correctly grasp and fully utilize the gains brought by the cooperation, they need to be informed in depth (e.g. in a form of seminars) and prepared for the planned changes. It is also important to involve the employees of the partner entities in such efforts.

To achieve successful and smooth building of cooperation management and its consequent use in a company, it is necessary to ensure the effective use of information. The company should aim to build such a system that would enable all participants of collaboration to have the access to all information they need in order to be able to fulfill their tasks. Partners need to have the access to all available data about their cooperation initiatives. When preparing cooperation ideas and plans, the employees should have the access to the complete history of cooperation activities, information about cooperation opportunities, references etc. The information tool in cooperation should allow the automatic access to the needed information and automatically save the data related to cooperation (the ideas, opportunities, activities, initiatives, relationships etc.) into a comprehensive database. This can be achieved only when the company provides efficient work with information.

Effective system for managing cooperation ideas, knowledge and relationships is one of the basic preconditions for successful implementation and use of cooperation management in a company. The proposed system is based on a marketing information system and was expanded with additional four specific modules:

- knowledge management module,
- module for work with cooperation ideas,
- module for work with cooperation opportunities,
- module for work with cooperation relationships.

If the company top management wants to manage such changes successfully, it is necessary to carry out the following processes in the company:

To create a vision of organizational changes: as the first step, it is necessary to identify all company ties and to consider the organizational structure. Based on the resulting information we can define the requirements for change

To prepare for organizational changes: as the second step, it is necessary to ensure the availability of knowledge required for the change, including necessary resources (financial, personal) and to prepare a plan for the change

To implement organizational changes: as the third step, it is necessary to improve communication with the employees and to explain the reasons for the change. The changes need to be monitored continuously and their success needs to be evaluated continuously.

The newly created organizational structure should support the modifications of the company to reflect the needs of the partners. This means there needs to be a flexible response to the requirements of the partners. The organizational structure should be aligned with the cooperation strategy.

In order for the realized organizational change to bring the desired effect, a certain change in mindsets should occur. The companies that wish to be successful should not focus narrowly only on their goals. They should also take

into account the results of their actions, once the goal is achieved. The change in mindsets represents a change of the perspective on collaboration of the company with its partners. It is necessary to make a shift from the view primarily focused on the individual contracts towards the view of collaborations from a long-term perspective. This is possible by shifting the mindset from seeing only the goal to seeing also the results of the actions.

As part of the cooperation, every company ought to be interested in the relationship with its partners. This is based on trust and mutual respect. If it happens that the trust is broken, this leads to a disrupted relationship and will negatively reflect on the performance of the company. It occurs in several cases that cooperation runs according to the company regulations, which are not identical with the requirements of the partners.

In order for the company to fully utilize all advantages of cooperation management, it needs to abandon the concept of being focused solely on reaching its goals. This does not mean that the company should stop being interested in such goals. The change is in that the company starts to perceive also the effects that materialize after the goals have been reached. The orientation towards the results enables the company to freely adjust and change its goals so that they keep bringing the desired results.

There are also possibilities to use cooperation management main processes and ideas to build competitive and effective organizational structures in regional development (Štofková, K., Štofková, J. 2011), in public transportations systems (Stopka *et al.* 2014), etc.

Company processes related to cooperation activities can be managed only when the company possesses profound knowledge about them – knows them, has them described, is aware of the qualitative and quantitative parameters of the processes using which they are evaluated, e.g. process analysis. Processes need to have their owners assigned and their inputs and outputs defined. In case that company processes do not bring the expected outcomes or are not sufficiently oriented towards cooperation, managers should consider modification and improvement of such cooperation processes.

## Conclusions

To implement the elements of cooperation management in a company is a complex process with ties to almost all aspects of a company. It includes organizational changes, re-engineering of processes as well as accumulation, analysis and use of data related to the cooperation. Key success factors for building and using cooperation management in a company include the following:

- strategy and planning,
- revision of company processes,

- changes to the organizational structure,
- changes to mindsets,
- effective work with information,
- cooperation database,
- sharing information with company employees and partners.

Business strategies that do not recognize the presence of complexity and uncertainty with related and future changes will be inflexible and unlikely to be correct (Varmus 2009).

For organizations that aim to be not only successful but also to ensure survival cooperation management represents a solution that will enable quick review of the market and will bring value into the enterprises for a long-term period. A company needs to manage the relationships and communication with its partners efficiently. Only with the help of continuous improvements to common projects and active communication a company will be able to retain its partners. The proposed model for building cooperation management in a company serves this purpose.

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