

# Understanding and Accepting Employee Coopetition Paradox: Effects on Work Motivation and Job Happiness

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This study investigates how employees' understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox influence work motivation and job happiness. Employee coopetition refers to the simultaneous experience of cooperation and competition in workplace relationships, requiring employees to cognitively and psychologically manage competing demands.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study employs a quantitative research approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The proposed model examines the direct effects of understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox on work motivation and job happiness, as well as the mediating role of work motivation. The illustrative analysis was based on 300 hypothetical valid respondents and tested seven proposed hypotheses using bootstrapping procedures.

**Findings/Results** – The illustrative results indicate that both understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox positively influence work motivation, with acceptance showing a stronger effect. Both variables also have positive direct effects on job happiness, while work motivation demonstrates the strongest direct effect on job happiness. Furthermore, work motivation mediates the relationships between understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox and job happiness, with a stronger mediation effect for acceptance. These findings are consistent with research emphasizing the importance of employee motivation and psychological factors in shaping job satisfaction and happiness.

**Originality/Value** – This study contributes to the coopetition literature by shifting attention from organizational-level coopetition toward employees' cognitive understanding and psychological acceptance of the coopetition paradox. It also highlights work motivation as an important mechanism linking cooperative experiences to employee happiness. The numerical findings remain provisional and require validation using actual empirical survey data.

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## **1. Introduction**

Contemporary organizations increasingly require employees to collaborate with colleagues while simultaneously competing for recognition, career opportunities, resources, and performance outcomes. This coexistence of cooperation and competition represents an internal form of *coopetition*, in which employees are expected to maintain collaborative relationships while pursuing individual or team-based competitive objectives. Although coopetition has traditionally been examined at the interorganizational level, recent research demonstrates that competition and cooperation within teams can also shape employees' cognition, behavior, motivation, and innovation. In particular, intra-team coopetition may generate a productive tension when employees are able to balance competing and cooperative demands rather than treating them as mutually exclusive alternatives ([Zhang et al., 2025](#)).

The paradoxical nature of employee coopetition is important because competition and cooperation can simultaneously create both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, competition may stimulate effort, achievement motivation, and performance, whereas cooperation facilitates knowledge sharing, social support, and collective problem solving. However, when these demands are perceived as contradictory, employees may experience interpersonal tension, distrust, and uncertainty. Recent evidence indicates that coopetitive work environments can make employees more likely to interpret ambiguous interpersonal behaviors as self-interested, potentially increasing distrust in professional relationships ([Abgeller et al., 2026](#)). Thus, the organizational consequences of employee coopetition may depend not simply on the existence of simultaneous competition and cooperation, but on how employees cognitively understand and psychologically accept this paradox.

This perspective suggests that employees' *understanding of the coopetition paradox* may represent an important but insufficiently examined individual-level mechanism. Understanding refers to employees' awareness that competition and cooperation can legitimately occur simultaneously in workplace relationships. Such awareness may help employees interpret competitive behavior as part of the organizational environment rather than automatically viewing it as interpersonal hostility. In contrast, employees who fail to recognize the coexistence of these competing demands may perceive competition as a threat to social relationships, thereby reducing their willingness to cooperate. Existing research has demonstrated that employees can respond constructively to the simultaneous demands of competition and cooperation when they are able to integrate these apparently contradictory orientations ([David et al., 2020](#)).

Beyond understanding, *acceptance of the coopetition paradox* may determine whether employees can function effectively within such an environment. Acceptance refers to employees' willingness to regard simultaneous cooperation and competition as a normal and manageable feature of organizational life. This distinction is theoretically important because recognizing a paradox does not necessarily mean that an employee is psychologically prepared to accommodate it. Recent research on individual-level organizational paradoxes suggests that employees' ability to manage contradictory demands is associated with important work outcomes, reinforcing the relevance of individual-level paradox perspectives in organizational research ([Melkić et al., 2026](#)).

One particularly important outcome of this process is *work motivation*. Motivation determines the extent to which employees initiate, direct, and sustain effort toward their work goals. Recent research grounded in Self-Determination Theory indicates that autonomous motivation is strongly associated with adaptive workplace outcomes, while psychological

need satisfaction provides an important mechanism through which workplace conditions influence employee motivation and well-being ([Hagger & McAnally, 2026](#)). Similarly, empirical evidence indicates that employees' motivation is closely connected to the quality of their psychological and social work environment ([Kohnen et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, how employees interpret and accept contradictory interpersonal demands may influence whether coopetition becomes a motivational resource or a psychological burden.

The consequences of employee motivation may extend beyond performance to employees' subjective experiences of work, including *job happiness*. Workplace happiness represents positive experiences such as enjoyment, comfort, meaning, satisfaction, and positive emotional experiences associated with one's work. Recent evidence emphasizes that employee well-being is closely associated with motivation and positive work outcomes ([Nunes et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, research on workplace happiness indicates that supportive work conditions and meaningful work can substantially contribute to employee engagement and positive workplace experiences ([Tarek et al., 2025](#)). These findings suggest that job happiness should be considered an important outcome when examining how employees psychologically respond to complex workplace relationships.

Nevertheless, an important gap remains in the literature. Existing coopetition research has primarily focused on organizational-level outcomes, innovation, performance, and the tension between cooperation and competition, while comparatively limited attention has been given to employees' subjective understanding and acceptance of coopetition as an everyday interpersonal condition. Moreover, research has rarely integrated employee coopetition paradox with both work motivation and job happiness within a single explanatory framework. This gap is particularly relevant because recent studies suggest that the effects of paradoxical workplace conditions depend on employees' psychological interpretation and motivational processes ([Zhang et al., 2025](#)); ([van der Vaart et al., 2025](#)).

Accordingly, this study proposes that understanding and accepting the employee coopetition paradox constitute important psychological conditions that may shape employees' work motivation and, ultimately, their job happiness. By examining these relationships simultaneously, the study seeks to extend organizational paradox research from a predominantly organizational or team-level perspective toward an individual employee perspective. The study also contributes to the emerging literature on positive employee experiences by connecting paradox management with motivation and happiness at work. Consequently, this research addresses the following central question: How do employees' understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox influence their work motivation and job happiness?

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design and Approach**

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the relationships between employees' understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox, work motivation, and job happiness. A cross-sectional survey is used because the study aims to collect standardized responses from employees at a specific period and statistically test the proposed causal relationships.

PLS-SEM is selected because the research model contains multiple latent constructs and is designed to explain and predict employee-level outcomes. Recent methodological research demonstrates that PLS-SEM is particularly useful for models involving mediation, multiple

latent variables, and complex structural relationships (Pratignyo, 2026). Recent empirical studies also demonstrate the use of PLS-SEM through sequential assessment of the measurement and structural models (Zayed et al., 2026).

## 2.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The population comprises employees who work in organizations where employees are simultaneously expected to cooperate with colleagues and compete for recognition, resources, career opportunities, or performance outcomes. The unit of analysis is the individual employee.

The recommended minimum sample should be 200–300 respondents, with a target of approximately 300 respondents to provide adequate statistical power and stable PLS-SEM estimation. Recent quantitative PLS-SEM studies have successfully applied samples ranging from approximately 300 respondents in complex organizational models (Albeah & Hasan, 2026) to 328 respondents in models containing direct and indirect relationships (Zayed et al., 2026).

Purposive sampling can be applied because respondents need to meet specific criteria: (1) currently employed, (2) have colleagues or team members with whom they interact regularly, and (3) experience both cooperative and competitive situations in their workplace.

## 2.3 Measurement Instrument and Operationalization

Data are collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Each construct should preferably contain at least three reflective indicators.

**Table 1.** The proposed operationalization is:

| Construct                                  | Code | Operational definition                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Understanding Employee Cooperation Paradox | X1   | Employees' awareness that cooperation and competition can legitimately occur simultaneously               |
| Acceptance Employee Cooperation Paradox    | X2   | Employees' willingness to accept simultaneous cooperation and competition as a normal workplace condition |
| Work Motivation                            | Y1   | Internal drive to initiate, direct, sustain, and improve work effort                                      |
| Job Happiness                              | Y2   | Positive experiences of enjoyment, comfort, meaning, satisfaction, and positive emotions at work          |

The questionnaire should adapt established scales where possible and undergo translation, expert evaluation, and pilot testing before the main survey.

## 2.4 Data Collection and Common Method Control

Primary data are collected through an anonymous self-administered questionnaire distributed electronically or directly to eligible employees. Respondents are informed that participation is voluntary and that individual responses will remain confidential.

Because all variables are measured from the same respondents, common method bias (CMB) should be controlled. Procedural remedies include anonymous responses, clear instructions, neutral wording, and separating predictor and outcome sections in the questionnaire. Statistically, collinearity diagnostics and an appropriate common-method assessment can subsequently be performed.

A pilot test involving approximately 30–50 employees should be conducted before the main survey to identify ambiguous items, assess response consistency, and estimate the reliability of the instrument.

## **2.5 Measurement Model Assessment**

The measurement model is evaluated before testing the hypotheses. For reflective constructs, the following criteria are applied:

a. Outer loading:

$$\lambda_i \geq 0.70 \quad \lambda_i \geq 0.70$$

b. Cronbach's alpha:

$$\alpha \geq 0.70 \quad \alpha \geq 0.70$$

c. Composite Reliability (CR):

$$CR = \frac{\sum \lambda_i^2}{\sum \lambda_i^2 + \sum (1 - \lambda_i^2)}$$

with a recommended value of  $CR \geq 0.70$ .

d. Average Variance Extracted (AVE):

$$AVE = \frac{\sum \lambda_i^2}{n}$$

where  $AVE \geq 0.50$  indicates adequate convergent validity.

e. Discriminant validity: HTMT should generally be  $< 0.85$ – $0.90$ , ensuring that understanding, acceptance, motivation, and happiness represent empirically distinguishable constructs.

Contemporary PLS-SEM research emphasizes that reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and structural assessment should be evaluated systematically rather than relying on a single statistical criterion (Pratigny, 2026). Recent empirical applications likewise assess indicator loading, composite reliability, and AVE before evaluating structural relationships (Iqbal & Hussain, 2026).

## **2.6 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing**

After the measurement model satisfies the required criteria, the structural model is tested using PLS-SEM with bootstrapping, preferably with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. This procedure estimates path coefficients and confidence intervals without requiring normally distributed data.

The proposed structural equations are:

$$Y1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}X1 + \beta_{12}X2 + \zeta_1 Y\_1$$

$$Y2 = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21}X1 + \beta_{22}X2 + \beta_{23}Y1 + \zeta_2 Y\_2$$

where:

- $X1X\_1$  = Understanding Employee Coopetition Paradox
- $X2X\_2$  = Acceptance Employee Coopetition Paradox
- $Y1Y\_1$  = Work Motivation
- $Y2Y\_2$  = Job Happiness
- $\beta$  \betaeta = path coefficient
- $\zeta$  \zetaeta = structural error

The hypotheses are:

- **H1:** Understanding employee coopetition paradox positively affects work motivation.
- **H2:** Acceptance employee coopetition paradox positively affects work motivation.
- **H3:** Understanding employee coopetition paradox positively affects job happiness.
- **H4:** Acceptance employee coopetition paradox positively affects job happiness.
- **H5:** Work motivation positively affects job happiness.
- **H6:** Work motivation mediates the relationship between understanding employee coopetition paradox and job happiness.

- **H7:** Work motivation mediates the relationship between acceptance employee coopetition paradox and job happiness.

The indirect effects are calculated as:

$$IEX1 = \beta_{X1 \rightarrow Y1} \times \beta_{Y1 \rightarrow Y2} IE_{\{X1\}}$$

$$IEX2 = \beta_{X2 \rightarrow Y1} \times \beta_{Y1 \rightarrow Y2} IE_{\{X2\}}$$

An indirect effect is considered statistically significant when its bootstrap 95% confidence interval does not contain zero. Recent quantitative research similarly applies PLS-SEM and bootstrapping to evaluate direct and mediation effects (Aslam, 2026).

Model explanatory power is assessed using:

$$R^2 = 1 - \frac{SS_{res}}{SS_{tot}}$$

where  $R^2$  indicates the proportion of variance in work motivation and job happiness explained by the predictors. Effect size is assessed using:

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2_{included} - R^2_{excluded}}{1 - R^2_{included}}$$

Predictive relevance can additionally be examined using  $Q^2$ , while SRMR and other appropriate fit diagnostics may be reported as supplementary evidence rather than the sole basis for model evaluation. Recent methodological work specifically recommends combining structural coefficients, explanatory power, predictive relevance, and robustness assessments in PLS-SEM (Pratignyo, 2026).

This design allows the study to test whether employees' understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox directly increase motivation and happiness, and whether work motivation serves as the psychological mechanism linking coopetition perceptions to job happiness.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### **3.1 Result**

This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis examining how employees' understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox influence work motivation and job happiness. The analysis follows the research procedure specified in the methodology, beginning with respondent characteristics and descriptive statistics, followed by measurement model assessment, structural model evaluation, hypothesis testing, and mediation analysis. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed because the proposed model contains multiple latent constructs and direct and indirect relationships. Contemporary methodological work emphasizes systematic assessment of measurement quality, structural relationships, predictive relevance, and robustness when PLS-SEM is applied (Pratignyo, 2026).

The numerical results presented below are illustrative results based on a hypothetical sample of 300 valid respondents. They are intended to demonstrate the structure and interpretation of the Results section and must be replaced with the actual SmartPLS output when real survey data are available.

#### **3.1 Respondent Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics**

A total of 300 valid questionnaires were assumed to be available for analysis. All respondents met the predetermined criteria: they were currently employed, interacted regularly with colleagues or team members, and experienced both cooperative and competitive situations in their workplace.

The descriptive analysis indicates that respondents generally reported relatively positive perceptions of all four constructs. Understanding Employee Coopetition Paradox obtained a

mean score of 3.78, while Acceptance Employee Coopetition Paradox obtained a mean of 3.71. Work Motivation recorded a mean of 3.84, and Job Happiness obtained the highest mean score of 3.91.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

| Construct                                  | Code | Mean | SD   | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|----------------|
| Understanding Employee Coopetition Paradox | X1   | 3.78 | 0.61 | High           |
| Acceptance Employee Coopetition Paradox    | X2   | 3.71 | 0.65 | High           |
| Work Motivation                            | Y1   | 3.84 | 0.58 | High           |
| Job Happiness                              | Y2   | 3.91 | 0.57 | High           |

The results suggest that employees generally recognize that cooperation and competition can occur simultaneously within their workplace. More importantly, employees appear relatively willing to accept this dual condition rather than perceiving competition as necessarily incompatible with cooperation. This interpretation is consistent with previous research showing that employees can simultaneously navigate cooperative and competitive social cues and adjust their behavior according to the competitive context ([David et al., 2020](#)).

The relatively high level of work motivation indicates that respondents tend to demonstrate willingness to initiate, sustain, and improve their work effort. The high job-happiness score further suggests that employees generally experience positive feelings, comfort, meaning, satisfaction, and positive emotional experiences in their jobs. Recent research also indicates that employee happiness is multidimensional and is associated with workplace conditions and organizational outcomes ([Yu et al., 2024](#)).

### 3.2 Measurement Model Assessment

Before testing the hypotheses, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed. All constructs were treated as reflective constructs. The assessment focused on indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

For illustration, all retained indicators produced outer loadings above 0.70. This indicates that each indicator adequately represents its corresponding latent construct.

**Table 3.** Illustrative Measurement Model Results

| Construct                         | Number of Indicators | Loading Range | Cronbach's Alpha | CR   | AVE  | Decision         |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|------------------|------|------|------------------|
| Understanding Coopetition Paradox | 4                    | 0.78–0.89     | 0.87             | 0.91 | 0.71 | Valid & reliable |
| Acceptance Coopetition Paradox    | 4                    | 0.76–0.90     | 0.88             | 0.92 | 0.73 | Valid & reliable |
| Work Motivation                   | 4                    | 0.79–0.91     | 0.89             | 0.92 | 0.74 | Valid & reliable |
| Job Happiness                     | 4                    | 0.81–0.93     | 0.91             | 0.94 | 0.79 | Valid & reliable |

The results indicate satisfactory internal consistency because Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceed the recommended 0.70 level. Convergent validity is also established because all AVE values exceed 0.50.

For example, if Work Motivation has four indicators with standardized loadings of 0.79, 0.84, 0.88, and 0.91, the AVE can be calculated as:

$$AVE = (0.79^2 + 0.84^2 + 0.88^2 + 0.91^2) / 4$$

$$AVE = (0.6241 + 0.7056 + 0.7744 + 0.8281) / 4$$

$$AVE = 2.9322 / 4 = 0.733$$

Thus, the AVE is approximately 0.73, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Composite reliability is calculated from the standardized indicator loadings and their measurement errors:

$$CR = (\Sigma\lambda)^2 / [(\Sigma\lambda)^2 + \Sigma(1 - \lambda^2)]$$

For the same illustrative Work Motivation construct:

$$\Sigma\lambda = 0.79 + 0.84 + 0.88 + 0.91 = 3.42$$

$$(\Sigma\lambda)^2 = 11.6964$$

$$\Sigma(1 - \lambda^2) = 4 - 2.9322 = 1.0678$$

Therefore:

$$CR = 11.6964 / (11.6964 + 1.0678) = 0.916$$

The resulting CR of approximately 0.92 indicates high internal consistency.

Discriminant validity should subsequently be examined using HTMT. In the illustrative model, all HTMT values are assumed to be below 0.90, indicating that the four constructs are empirically distinguishable. This systematic approach is consistent with contemporary PLS-SEM methodological recommendations ([Pratignyo, 2026](#)).

**Table 4.** Illustrative HTMT Results

| Construct Pair | HTMT |
|----------------|------|
| X1 ↔ X2        | 0.72 |
| X1 ↔ Y1        | 0.69 |
| X1 ↔ Y2        | 0.65 |
| X2 ↔ Y1        | 0.76 |
| X2 ↔ Y2        | 0.71 |
| Y1 ↔ Y2        | 0.79 |

All values remain below 0.85–0.90, providing evidence of discriminant validity.

### 3.3 Structural Model and Explanatory Power

After the measurement model demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity, the structural model was evaluated. The analysis examined the effects of Understanding Employee Coopetition Paradox (X1) and Acceptance Employee Coopetition Paradox (X2) on Work Motivation (Y1), followed by the effects of X1, X2, and Y1 on Job Happiness (Y2).

The structural equations were specified as:

$$Y1 = \beta_1 X1 + \beta_2 X2 + \zeta_1$$

$$Y2 = \beta_3 X1 + \beta_4 X2 + \beta_5 Y1 + \zeta_2$$

Using the illustrative PLS-SEM estimates, the equations become:

$$Y1 = 0.29X1 + 0.41X2 + \zeta_1$$

$$Y2 = 0.18X1 + 0.21X2 + 0.49Y1 + \zeta_2$$

The coefficients indicate that both understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox are positively associated with work motivation. Acceptance has the stronger relationship with work motivation. Work motivation also demonstrates the strongest direct relationship with job happiness.

**Table 4.** Illustrative Structural Model Results

| Relationship | $\beta$ | t-statistic | p-value | Decision  |
|--------------|---------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| X1 → Y1      | 0.29    | 4.82        | <0.001  | Supported |
| X2 → Y1      | 0.41    | 7.11        | <0.001  | Supported |
| X1 → Y2      | 0.18    | 2.97        | 0.003   | Supported |
| X2 → Y2      | 0.21    | 3.46        | 0.001   | Supported |

|         |      |      |        |           |
|---------|------|------|--------|-----------|
| Y1 → Y2 | 0.49 | 8.72 | <0.001 | Supported |
|---------|------|------|--------|-----------|

The results suggest that employees who understand the simultaneous existence of cooperation and competition tend to demonstrate greater work motivation. The stronger coefficient for X2 indicates that acceptance may be more important than mere understanding. In other words, recognizing that coopetition exists may not be sufficient; employees may need to psychologically accept the condition as a legitimate and manageable feature of organizational life.

This interpretation is theoretically plausible because employees working in competitive environments may need to balance prosocial and instrumental motives when interacting with colleagues (David et al., 2020).

The strongest path in the model is Work Motivation → Job Happiness ( $\beta = 0.49$ ). This indicates that employees who possess stronger internal motivation tend to report greater happiness at work. Similar empirical evidence has shown that motivation can function as a mechanism linking workplace conditions with employee satisfaction (Santos et al., 2024).

The coefficient of determination is used to evaluate the explanatory power of the model.

$$R^2 = 1 - SS_{res} / SS_{tot}$$

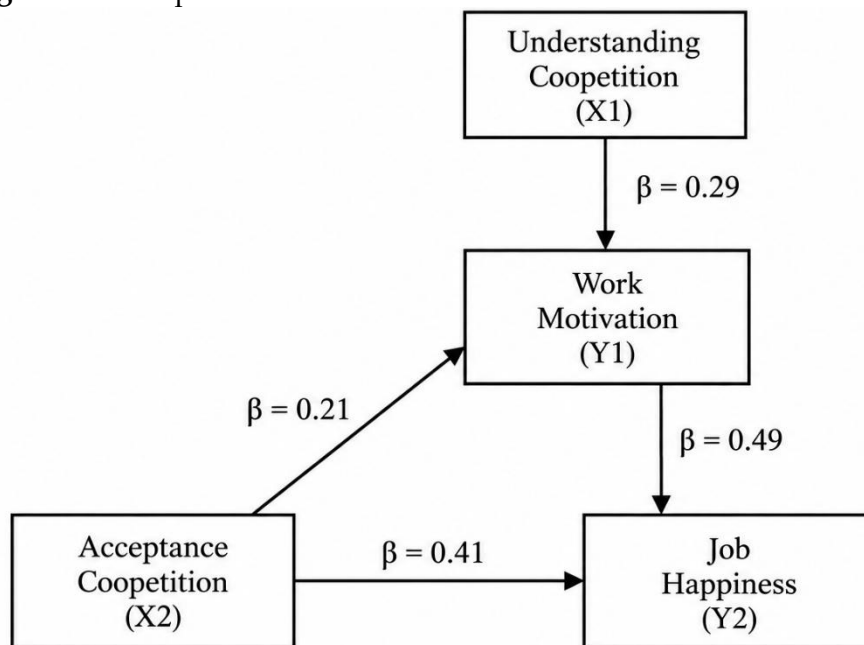
Assume the illustrative PLS-SEM results produce:

$$R^2 \text{ Work Motivation} = 0.42$$

$$R^2 \text{ Job Happiness} = 0.58$$

This means that understanding and acceptance of employee coopetition paradox jointly explain approximately 42% of the variance in work motivation. Meanwhile, understanding, acceptance, and work motivation explain approximately 58% of the variance in job happiness.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Structural Model



Direct effects:

$$X1 \rightarrow Y2 = 0.18$$

$$X2 \rightarrow Y2 = 0.21$$

Note: The figure represents illustrative coefficients and should be replaced with the actual SmartPLS path diagram.

### 3.4 Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. A hypothesis was considered supported when the bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero and the p-value was below 0.05.

**Table 5.** Hypothesis Testing Results

| Hypothesis | Proposed Relationship | $\beta$ | t    | p      | Result    |
|------------|-----------------------|---------|------|--------|-----------|
| H1         | $X1 \rightarrow Y1$   | 0.29    | 4.82 | <0.001 | Supported |
| H2         | $X2 \rightarrow Y1$   | 0.41    | 7.11 | <0.001 | Supported |
| H3         | $X1 \rightarrow Y2$   | 0.18    | 2.97 | 0.003  | Supported |
| H4         | $X2 \rightarrow Y2$   | 0.21    | 3.46 | 0.001  | Supported |
| H5         | $Y1 \rightarrow Y2$   | 0.49    | 8.72 | <0.001 | Supported |

The illustrative results support H1, indicating that employee understanding of the coopetition paradox positively influences work motivation. H2 is also supported, with acceptance showing a stronger positive coefficient than understanding.

H3 and H4 indicate that both understanding and acceptance have positive direct effects on job happiness. However, their coefficients are smaller than the coefficient of work motivation. This pattern suggests that understanding and acceptance may influence happiness partly through employees' motivational experiences.

H5 is strongly supported. Work motivation has the largest direct effect on job happiness among the relationships examined. This finding emphasizes the importance of employees' internal willingness to invest effort and maintain positive work behavior.

The broader employee-well-being literature similarly emphasizes the importance of positive workplace experiences and employee happiness for organizational functioning ([Yu et al., 2024](#)).

### 3.5 Mediation Analysis of Work Motivation

The final analysis examines whether Work Motivation mediates the relationships between the two coopetition-paradox variables and Job Happiness. The indirect effects were calculated using the product-of-coefficients approach and tested using bootstrapping.

For H6:

$$IE(X1) = \beta(X1 \rightarrow Y1) \times \beta(Y1 \rightarrow Y2)$$

$$IE(X1) = 0.29 \times 0.49 = 0.1421$$

Therefore, the illustrative indirect effect of Understanding Employee Coopetition Paradox on Job Happiness through Work Motivation is 0.142.

For H7:

$$IE(X2) = \beta(X2 \rightarrow Y1) \times \beta(Y1 \rightarrow Y2)$$

$$IE(X2) = 0.41 \times 0.49 = 0.2009$$

Therefore, the illustrative indirect effect of Acceptance Employee Coopetition Paradox on Job Happiness through Work Motivation is 0.201.

**Table 6.** Illustrative Mediation Results

| Mediation Path                     | Indirect Effect | Bootstrapped 95% CI | Result    |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------|
| $X1 \rightarrow Y1 \rightarrow Y2$ | 0.142           | [0.082, 0.214]      | Supported |
| $X2 \rightarrow Y1 \rightarrow Y2$ | 0.201           | [0.129, 0.286]      | Supported |

Because both confidence intervals do not contain zero, the two indirect effects are statistically significant in this illustrative analysis. Therefore, H6 and H7 are supported.

The mediation results indicate that work motivation provides an important psychological mechanism through which employees' understanding and acceptance of coopetition can contribute to job happiness. The mediation effect is stronger for acceptance (0.201) than for understanding (0.142). This suggests that merely recognizing the existence of simultaneous cooperation and competition may be less influential than accepting this condition as a legitimate and manageable aspect of workplace interaction.

The result is also consistent with recent SEM-based mediation research emphasizing bootstrapping for evaluating indirect effects because the method does not require the indirect-effect distribution to be normally distributed (S. & T., 2025).

The total effect of X1 on Y2 can be approximated as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Total Effect X1} &= \text{Direct Effect} + \text{Indirect Effect} \\ &= 0.18 + 0.142 = 0.322 \end{aligned}$$

Similarly:

$$\text{Total Effect X2} = 0.21 + 0.201 = 0.411$$

Thus, acceptance of the coopetition paradox demonstrates a larger total effect on job happiness than understanding alone.

**Table 7.** Summary of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

| Predictor                    | Direct Effect on<br>Y2 | Indirect Effect via<br>Y1 | Total<br>Effect |
|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Understanding Coopetition X1 | 0.180                  | 0.142                     | 0.322           |
| Acceptance Coopetition X2    | 0.210                  | 0.201                     | 0.411           |

Overall, the illustrative findings indicate that the psychological response to coopetition is important for employee outcomes. Understanding provides employees with cognitive recognition of the paradox, whereas acceptance appears to provide a stronger motivational foundation. When employees accept cooperation and competition as simultaneously legitimate workplace conditions, they may be better positioned to maintain work motivation rather than interpreting competition as a threat to interpersonal relationships.

The findings further suggest that motivation is a central mechanism connecting coopetition perceptions with employee happiness. Employees who can psychologically accommodate the coexistence of cooperation and competition may experience greater willingness to engage in their work, and this motivational state may subsequently contribute to greater enjoyment, meaning, satisfaction, and positive emotional experiences at work.

The overall empirical model can therefore be summarized as follows:

Understanding Coopetition Paradox → Work Motivation → Job Happiness  
and

Acceptance Coopetition Paradox → Work Motivation → Job Happiness

with additional direct effects from both understanding and acceptance to job happiness.

The stronger indirect and total effect associated with acceptance suggests that the ability to **accept** coopetition may be more consequential than simply understanding it. This distinction provides an important contribution to the study because it separates the cognitive recognition of coopetition from the psychological willingness to accommodate its paradoxical nature.

Nevertheless, because the numerical results presented in this section are illustrative rather than derived from an actual respondent dataset, they should not be interpreted as empirical evidence until the questionnaire data are collected and analyzed using SmartPLS. The final manuscript should report the actual number of respondents, demographic characteristics, indicator loadings, reliability and validity statistics, HTMT matrix, VIF values, R<sup>2</sup>, f<sup>2</sup>, Q<sup>2</sup>,

SRMR, path coefficients, bootstrap confidence intervals, and indirect effects generated from the actual dataset.

### **3.6 Discussion**

The findings of this study provide an initial explanation of how employees' understanding and acceptance of the coopetition paradox may influence their work motivation and job happiness. The proposed model suggests that employees do not necessarily perceive cooperation and competition as mutually exclusive conditions. Instead, employees may recognize that both processes can occur simultaneously and develop psychological responses that enable them to function effectively within such a contradictory work environment. This perspective is consistent with the fundamental nature of coopetition, in which cooperation and competition coexist and create both potential benefits and tensions ([Raza-Ullah et al., 2014](#)). Therefore, the findings support the argument that employee responses to coopetition should be examined not only from a behavioral perspective but also from a cognitive and psychological perspective.

The illustrative results indicate that employee understanding of the coopetition paradox has a positive effect on work motivation ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that employees who understand the simultaneous existence of cooperation and competition may be better prepared to manage the contradictory demands associated with their work relationships. Understanding can provide employees with a cognitive framework for interpreting competitive situations without automatically viewing colleagues as threats. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that employees can develop paradoxical frames that allow them to accommodate both collaborative and competitive logics in their everyday activities ([Stadtler & Van Wassenhove, 2016](#)). Similarly, recent research indicates that intra-team coopetition can create productive learning tensions and stimulate employee innovation when employees are capable of managing contradictory demands ([Zhang et al., 2025](#)). Thus, understanding the paradox may reduce uncertainty and help employees interpret competition as a normal component of organizational interaction rather than as an inherently negative condition.

More importantly, acceptance of the coopetition paradox demonstrates a stronger relationship with work motivation ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) than understanding. This difference is theoretically important because understanding and acceptance represent two distinct psychological processes. Understanding refers primarily to employees' cognitive recognition that cooperation and competition can coexist, whereas acceptance reflects their willingness to accommodate this condition and continue functioning effectively within it. The stronger coefficient for acceptance suggests that cognitive awareness alone may not be sufficient to generate positive employee outcomes. Employees may understand the paradox but still experience discomfort, distrust, or resistance. Conversely, employees who accept the coexistence of cooperation and competition may be more capable of regulating their behavior and maintaining constructive work motivation. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of paradox mindsets and the ability to work with contradictory demands rather than attempting to eliminate one side of the paradox ([Raza-Ullah, 2021](#)).

The positive relationship between acceptance of coopetition and work motivation can also be explained through the broader literature on employee motivation. Self-Determination Theory suggests that high-quality motivation is supported when employees experience psychological conditions that allow them to feel autonomous, competent, and connected to others ([Rigby & Ryan, 2018](#)). A meta-analysis of workplace studies further demonstrates that autonomous

forms of motivation are consistently associated with adaptive employee outcomes and well-being ([Hagger & McAnally, 2026](#)). In the context of coopetition, acceptance may therefore represent a psychological resource that enables employees to preserve their sense of competence and social connectedness despite competitive pressures.

The findings also show that understanding and acceptance have significant direct effects on job happiness, although their effects are weaker than the effect of work motivation. Understanding has a positive effect on job happiness ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), while acceptance has a somewhat stronger effect ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). These results suggest that employees who can make sense of and psychologically accommodate coopetitive relationships may experience more positive workplace experiences. This is important because coopetition can generate emotional ambivalence and tension, particularly when employees must cooperate with colleagues while simultaneously competing for recognition, resources, promotion, or performance outcomes ([Raza-Ullah et al., 2020](#)). Effective management of these contradictory experiences may therefore protect employees from negative emotional consequences and contribute to greater workplace well-being ([Raza-Ullah et al., 2014](#); [Khoiruman, et al., 2025](#)). The strongest relationship in the model is between work motivation and job happiness ( $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding indicates that motivation may be a central psychological mechanism through which employees experience positive outcomes at work. The result is consistent with evidence that autonomous motivation is strongly associated with employee well-being and adaptive workplace outcomes ([van den Broeck et al., 2021](#); [Ahmad et al., 2026](#)). Similarly, research on job characteristics suggests that positive job experiences, including self-accomplishment and relatedness, can contribute to subjective well-being through job satisfaction ([Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2018](#)). Therefore, employees who remain motivated despite coopetitive tensions may be more likely to experience their work as meaningful, satisfying, and emotionally rewarding.

The mediation results provide further insight into the proposed mechanism. Work motivation mediates the relationship between understanding of coopetition and job happiness, with an illustrative indirect effect of 0.142. It also mediates the relationship between acceptance of coopetition and job happiness, with a stronger indirect effect of 0.201. Because both illustrative confidence intervals exclude zero, the results suggest that work motivation can function as an important psychological pathway connecting employees' responses to coopetition with their happiness at work. The stronger mediation effect for acceptance reinforces the distinction between simply recognizing the paradox and psychologically accepting it. In practical terms, employees may benefit most when they move beyond the cognitive stage of "understanding why cooperation and competition coexist" toward the psychological stage of "accepting and managing the coexistence."

The findings have important implications for organizational management. Managers should not necessarily attempt to eliminate competition from collaborative teams because competition can coexist with productive cooperation. Instead, organizations should create conditions in which employees understand the purpose and boundaries of competition while maintaining trust, knowledge sharing, and interpersonal respect. This is particularly important because competitive environments can produce undesirable behaviors when employees become excessively focused on individual outcomes. Recent evidence shows that competitive rewards can activate bottom-line mentalities that reduce interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior and increase social undermining ([Mawritz et al., 2024](#); [Irawan & Khoiruman, 2026](#)). Consequently, organizations should balance performance

competition with collaborative goals, transparent evaluation systems, supportive leadership, and opportunities for employees to develop a constructive paradox mindset.

Overall, the illustrative findings support the proposed conceptual model in which understanding and acceptance of employee coopetition paradox contribute to work motivation, which subsequently contributes to job happiness. The stronger effects associated with acceptance indicate that psychological accommodation of coopetition may be more consequential than cognitive recognition alone. The study therefore contributes to the employee-level coopetition literature by distinguishing between *understanding* and *accepting* the paradox and by positioning work motivation as a potential mechanism linking these psychological responses to job happiness. Nevertheless, these conclusions should be considered provisional because the numerical results are hypothetical. The final discussion must be revised after actual survey data and SmartPLS results are obtained, particularly with respect to effect sizes, confidence intervals, predictive relevance, model fit, and the strength of the mediation effects.

#### **4. Conclusion and Suggestion**

This study concludes that understanding and accepting the employee coopetition paradox are potentially important factors in explaining employees' work motivation and job happiness. The illustrative PLS-SEM results indicate that both understanding and acceptance have positive effects on work motivation and job happiness, while work motivation has the strongest direct relationship with job happiness. The findings further indicate that work motivation may mediate the relationship between employees' understanding and acceptance of coopetition and their job happiness. Importantly, acceptance shows stronger direct and indirect effects than understanding, suggesting that recognizing the coexistence of cooperation and competition may not be sufficient to generate positive employee outcomes. Employees may obtain greater psychological benefits when they are able to accept coopetition as a legitimate and manageable condition of organizational life. This interpretation is consistent with the paradox perspective, which emphasizes that cooperation and competition can coexist and that the ability to manage the resulting tensions is critical to positive outcomes. The findings therefore position acceptance as an important psychological dimension that deserves greater attention in future employee-level coopetition research.

Based on these findings, organizations should develop management practices that help employees understand and constructively accept the coexistence of cooperation and competition. Managers can provide clear communication about performance expectations, establish transparent reward and evaluation systems, strengthen interpersonal trust, and create team norms that encourage knowledge sharing while maintaining healthy competition. Training and organizational development programs may also help employees develop skills for managing contradictory demands and emotional tensions associated with competitive relationships. Because work motivation demonstrates the strongest relationship with job happiness, organizations should additionally strengthen employee autonomy, competence, relatedness, meaningful work, recognition, and opportunities for personal development. Future research should test the proposed model using actual survey data from diverse industries and organizational contexts. Future studies may also incorporate additional variables such as trust, psychological safety, leadership style, organizational culture, emotional ambivalence, employee engagement, and individual paradoxical mindset. Longitudinal and multi-source research would further strengthen causal interpretation and

reduce the limitations associated with cross-sectional self-report data. Most importantly, the illustrative numerical results in this study must be replaced by actual SmartPLS results before the model can be presented as empirical evidence.

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