



MINI STUDIES OF COMPETITION IN THE MODERN SOCIETY:
HOW COMMON BELIEFS MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM REALITY

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Abstract

This paper is a collection of mini-case studies of competition in various types of organizations and environments that each author has been involved in professionally. We explore dynamics of competition through small cases in an organization of work, sports, family, and a military unit. By examining real-life small cases from diverse contexts, we hoped to gain insights into competitive behaviors. What we found, however, was that only replacing competitive behaviors with cooperation drove positive results.

Key Words: Competition, Organizations, Leadership, Leaders, Organizational Theory

Introduction

Darwin (1859) is attributed to emphasizing competition as a major driving principle in a species' survival. Smith (1991) described competition as a major progress factor in the capitalist society of free markets. It is generally believed that competition is a good and positive driver of behavior. It is most encouraged in today's capitalist market economy. Competition is also thought of as something positive and beneficial in many organizations.

The authors have decided to study mini cases in various types of organizations and scenarios to understand the competitive behaviors better. These mini studies included a formal organization where people work, sports, family, and a small military unit.

Study 1: Competition in an Organization

Early on in my career, I had a supervisor who only rewarded results. The employees that she believed could maintain the lowest payouts and show the steadiest service "numbers" were often rewarded and allowed "exemptions," while others were constantly ridiculed. There were no rewards for being a team

player or having innovative ideas. This created an atmosphere where employees rarely collaborated.

My orientation to my new role of transportation manager included "on the job" training. Three days of shadowing a colleague were supposed to be mentoring. What it amounted to was her complaining about the job and then thrusting me into the active competition against her and the group of other managers. It was confusing and frustrating.

I learned quickly that I would need to either learn the job on my own or find another job quickly. I would try to collaborate with a colleague, only to be left with incomplete tasks or end up being reprimanded when my resources were depleted by a deceptive collaborator, leaving me unable to move forward with my tasks. They would convince my staff to call out of work, encourage them to refuse my direction based on rumors, mis-assign vehicles, purposely hide clearance paperwork. It was awful. Eventually, I branched out to other areas, but our progress as a team declined. Our department faced a major backlash.

Finding

The organization performed poorly because of internal competition. Competitive work environments breed stress, corruption, anger, individualism, and failure.

Study 2: Competition in Sports

On our team, the coaches encourage us to compete to earn playing time. This competitive nature in practices trickles over into the games. There have been many instances when teammates talk bad about one another to the coaches during games to get more playing time for themselves.

Not only do we compete as players, but our coaches compete too. The assistant coaches compete to be liked more by the players as well as to be seen as the “better coach” in the head coach's eyes, while the head coach competes with the captains of the team.

There was a game when athletes recommended to the head coach that we should switch our defense. We were scowled and ignored.

During our halftime, she yelled at us, claiming we just weren't trying hard enough. When we started the second half, playing the same defense, the other team continued winning. Eventually she decided to try our idea, and we were able to work together as a team, winning the game.

Finding

Only when we collaborate and work together, we can play well, and have a chance of winning. Competition brings the entire team down, and often sets us back.

Study 3: Competition in the Family

Family cannot feasibly operate with a competitive culture. All members must work together to achieve the common goal to live and thrive in harmony.

In my case, I am the only parent, caring for my son and daughter. As a university student, for the past three semesters, I have had to take many different classes every week. I shift our family schedule to accommodate my educational pursuits.

Shifting duties among family members is how we collaborate to achieve our weekly goals, and also my long-term goal of completing my degree.

I am also fostering collaborative personalities within my children because I encourage them to help each other, and also to help me. When someone in our family is doing well, it is good for the other members. By maintaining a nurturing environment in my home, and encouraging each member to promote being helpful, my children, hopefully, will be able to grow up and through introspection, develop even more progressive ways to provide a collaborative environment within their own homes.

Finding

The family, at least my family, can only operate in a collaborative mode – there is no competition inside the family.

Study 4: Competition in a Military Unit

As a Sergeant in the Marine Corps, I led a team of five Marines in a mountain training exercise. Our mission was to construct a temporary bridge across a swift-moving river to enable our platoon to cross safely.

We hit our first snag when we realized we were short on materials. One of the Lance Corporals suggested we search the surrounding forest for fallen trees and vines that could reinforce the bridge.

Just as we were making headway, a sudden downpour caused the river to surge, making it nearly impossible to work on the bridge. A Corporal proposed splitting into two teams: one to redirect the water flow and the other to press on with construction.

Despite our efforts, we started falling behind schedule. Another Lance Corporal suggested working in round-the-clock shifts to keep the progress steady, while a Private First Class recommended prioritizing tasks based on their importance.

As we approached the finish line, our main piece of equipment failed. I quickly evaluated the situation and radioed our base for a replacement. In the meantime, I had the team focus on completing other aspects of the bridge.

Through sheer determination and *teamwork*, we finished constructing the bridge just in time for our platoon to cross safely.

Finding

Only through collaboration and working together we were able to accomplish the mission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examples from work, sports, family, and the military demonstrate that only through cooperation groups thrive and attain their shared objectives.

It is unclear if a competitive work environment drives results, but it certainly fosters a culture of individualism and mistrust, hindering long-term success.

The question then arises why our corporate, national, and global leaders compete? These four mini-case studies clearly demonstrate that it is only through working together that good results may be attained. Perhaps there is another school of thought that may need to be discussed to build a more cooperative society in the 21st century (Asimov, 1985, Chomsky, 2023, Kropotkin, 1902, Jaques, 2002, Deming, 2018, 2018).

Perhaps, Darwin (1859), Smith (1991), and others may have accurately observed competition as a factor, arguably a more superficial factor (Ivanov, 2011, 2015, 2022, 2023), than a major cornerstone element, which is coopera-

tion, that allows a species a greater chances of survival (Kropotkin, 1902). More studies are urgently needed, considering that the Doomsday Clock is

about to run out of seconds before midnight (2024).

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