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Competition

In 1982, Andrew M. Colman edited a curious and scholarly book called Cooperation and Competition in Humans and Animals. In his own chapter titled Experimental Games, he builds off of Game Theory to make some important points.

Anyone who reads Game Theory knows it is about how decision-making scenarios and how multiple parties make their choices. The heart of Game Theory is extreme math, and one admittedly far removed from real world scenarios. For instance, Colman admits that to even construct a Game Theory scenario that can be calculated, the scholar must forbid communication. Communication facilitates cooperation and reduces the competitive nature of the game.

Colman also notes that the larger the group, the more one must set down one's individuality (de-individuation) if there is going to be a decent level of cooperation that keeps the group together. The larger the group, the less the individual brings to the group effort.

Colman's work seems to imply that smaller working groups will draw more richly on the gifts of the individual than will large ones. It also points group leaders to the strength of good internal communication and how it breaks down the silo and competitive effects so prevalent among departments of an organization. For instance, think what happens to a football team where the offensive line and running backs think they are competing against each other instead of their opponent, and what it would take to change the mentality.

Communication does not have to diminish the rich interchange between varied points of view. Instead, communication can be set up so it is far safer to express divergent or digressing points of view than within a strictly competitive environment. Communication makes it more likely those alternate ideas could then be appropriated to affect the ultimate and perhaps even more successful outcome. Competition is win-lose. Communication focuses the interchange and builds cooperation so that everyone benefits.

— mark l. vincent

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