COMPETITION: IMPLICATIONS ON PERFORMANCE, PSYCHOLOGY, WITHIN A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

Arul J. Kirubakaran and Adithya A Shet

Senior Team Leader, Automation & Control- Baker Hughes,[2] Intern, Automation & Control-Baker Hughes

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary organizational landscape, interdependence among team members has become the cornerstone of productivity and innovation. Advancement in product and service delivery requires a confluence of various domain expertise in creating optimal products and services, and this confluence requires maximizing interdependence and not maximum individual excellence. While healthy competition can motivate personal growth and excellence in delivery, hypercompetition has been shown to erode collaboration, create psychological stress, and diminish both individual and team performance, leading to failure and loss of reputation. This paper explores the dual nature of competition within teams, examining its psychological and operational effects, and emphasizing the importance of team behaviors like mutual respect, Inclusive, transparent communication, and collective success. Drawing upon contemporary literature and empirical findings, including studies by [23] Beersma et al. (2003), [24] Ren et al. (2024), [25] Li, J (2022), and [26] Moczulska et al. (2024), this paper integrates both theoretical insights and workplace observations to propose strategies for channeling individual aspirations towards collective outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Healthy Competition. Hypercompetition, Multiobjective team, single objective team. Interdependence, Individual excellence.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of workplace dynamics has led to a paradigm where collaboration from interdependence among team members is more significant than independent contribution. A team's success is no longer defined by the sum of individual brilliance but by the synergy of its collaboration. Interestingly summation of unaligned and hypercompetition brilliance leads to pockets of excellence and overall failure of the team. However, positive competition within teams has often been encouraged by traditional hierarchical models as means of maximizing teams' potential, however hyper competition has been posing a threat to teams' synergy.

II. THE NATURE OF COMPETITION IN TEAMS

A. Hypercompetition: A Psychological Hazard

Hypercompetition can result in psychological insecurity, hiding knowledge, resentment, and interpersonal conflict.

[25] Li (2022) highlights how personal competition can lead to insecurity, knowledge hiding, especially in the form of "playing dumb," ultimately harming team performance. [24] Ren et al. (2024) further it elaborates that in hypercompetitive environment, impacts the team members in different ways, hyper competition impacts the most on the bottom of the pyramid structure of the team, as the flow down of the instructions and knowledge is disrupted, causing frustrations and failure of the team. On the top of the pyramid, it creates disruption of motivation causing distraction on the direction of the team purpose.

Hypercompetition creates a culture of insecurity that drives a constant need for validation. Teams in this environment often lose creativity, devolving into task- oriented execution models where individuals seek recognition after completing assigned work. If left unaddressed, this behavior can gradually dismantle the team's collaborative fabric.

It is imperative that the people leader identify the hyper competition very early in the team and implement corrective action. While there are multiple ways to identify such behaviors One of the easiest ways to identify this behavior is to see how team responds to failures, if failures are owned as collective responsibility and not as individual fault, The team has a positive competitive spirit. When failures are associated with individual actions, Leaders need to step in to coach and mentor the team against hypercompetitive behavior, instill and prove how lack of collective responsibility causes the failure.
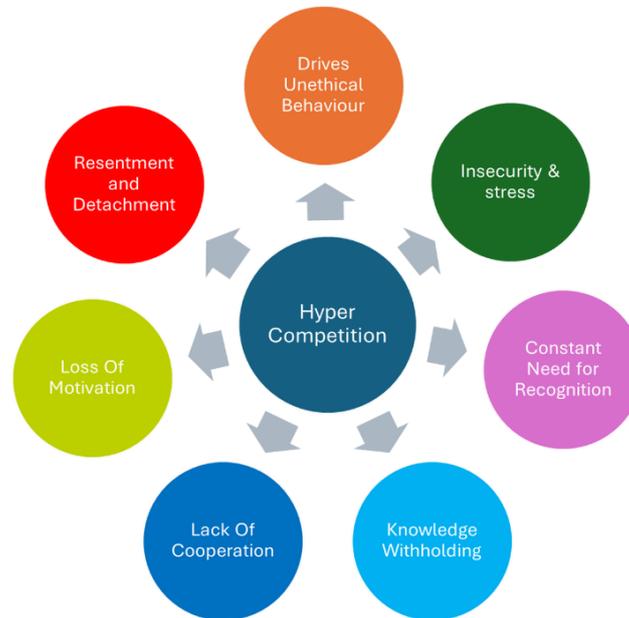
Fig: 2.1 Impact of Hyper competition within the team

B. Personal Development Competition: Positive competition

In contrast, personal development competition encourages continuous learning and enjoyment of the task itself. When competition centers around self-improvement rather than outperforming peers, it aligns well with empowering team dynamics. This constructive rivalry brings the best in the team irrespective of the position in the team pyramid. Especially the bottom of the pyramid feels empowered and the sense of belonging increases. Each member of the team places success on the team over individual success. People at every point and especially at the top of the pyramid are ready to take calculated risk without the fear of failure, when such team has clear visibility on its goals and objectives, the performance peaks, as each member becomes a leader in his own sphere of influence and enlarging the impact of the team in the organization. The team becomes humbler and learning gaps are more openly admitted, failures are better handled, and continuous learning and agility are encouraged. Empowered teams tend to exhibit greater flexibility, resilience, and problem-solving capabilities [27] (Chen et al., 2007).

When the team is exhibiting this behavior, it is imperative on the people leader to recognize this, and nurture this spirit, While Key performance indicators are results are important from a business perspective, leadership can realize that it is matter of time when the performance of the team peaks and results are available. Leaders should be careful enough to avoid the bottom-line mentality (BLM), valuing outcomes over ethics or well-being. This myopic focus reduces pro- social behaviors and creates a toxic atmosphere. Leadership should be willing to provide time and challenge the team
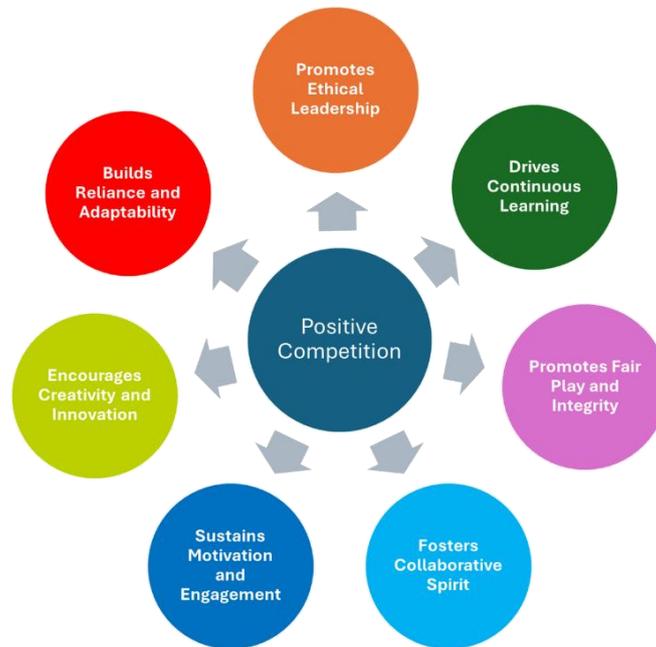
incrementally towards the goal.

Fig: 2.2 Impact of positive competition within the team

III. INTERDEPENDANCE VS. INDIVIDUAL EXCELLENCE

In modern teams, especially those handling complex, multidimensional objectives, interdependence is critical. Today products and services are a confluence of multidisciplinary knowledge and require extensive collaboration between people from different skillsets, as product and service have the confluence of different domains.

The right combination of these for an optimal expense to return ratio requires interdependence with the right spirit of competition. High-performing teams are often those where individual weaknesses are offset by collective strength. [26] Moczulska et al. (2024) found that teams with balanced collaboration and manageable competition delivered the highest engagement and outcomes. However, when internal rivalry dominates, the team suffers—not only in cohesion but also in business metrics such as profit margins.

When interdependence is overshadowed by internal rivalry, individual aspirations can hinder team cohesion. Internal rivalry can lead to aspiration for recognition and cause a suboptimal mix of contribution from different domains in delivery of products and services, this sub optimal mix has impact on the expense to return impacting margin of the business. Internal rivalry can also create

dissent within the team regarding reward and recognition; in pursuit of rewards the contributions are hyped with results projections. For example, [23] Beersma et al. (2003) showed that competitive reward structures enhanced speed but harmed accuracy, especially when team members were less agreeable or extroverted. In such scenarios, high individual performance comes at the cost of overall team functionality.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS AND COMPETITIVE IMPACT

In different team structures, the nature of competition is different and let's explore how leadership can drive positive competition with different team structures.

A. Multi-Objective Teams

In teams handling diverse objectives—multiple products, services, or clients—alignment of individual aspirations with each of the diverse goals fosters a collaborative mindset. When each team member drives their objective independently, competition becomes external, encouraging peer learning and shared recognition. It is easier to build a team that drives performance across diverse objectives, and each member of the team has clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and collaboration within the team in delivering on this responsibility is much easier. The people leader is expected to facilitate knowledge sharing among different team members and ensure availability of support between team members. While individual contributions and performance is important factor in teams' overall performance, Rewards and recognition-based knowledge being shared and experiences of overcoming challenges in overall execution can create an open and transparent team conversation. This further motivates the team in knowledge sharing and collaboration.

B. Single-Objective Teams

In contrast, single-objective teams are more prone to destructive competition. The similarity in roles and objectives fosters direct comparisons, often breeding rivalry. It requires significant effort in monitoring and coaching the team to evolve as a cohesive team, if left unchecked, the team can get in hypercompetition mode, resulting in slow destruction and failure of the team. While there are multiple ways one can deal with this situation, one of the easy ways is to redirect competition by benchmarking against other functional teams and promoting internal collaboration over comparison.

In moving the competition outside the team and benchmarking against other functional teams, the leaders can create a sense of belonging and collective responsibility to achieve team success. The leaders can facilitate project / product status presentation within the team, where each members present what is the contribution has been made and what is the road ahead, this gives clear visibility to the team on the current position, how distant the team is placed with respect to the final goal. This also helps the team to appreciate the effort of each team member and their contribution, increasing

International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management Studies

ISSN 2582-2292

Vol. 7, No. 04 July-Aug; 2025 Page. No. 623-631

significantly the collaboration within the team. Echoing [26] Moczulska et al. (2024), such recognition fosters engagement and sustains high morale even under competitive pressures.

V. BEHAVIOR-DRIVEN CULTURE: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

To further ground these behaviors in practice, consider the example of the New Zealand All Blacks, one of the most successful cricket teams globally. Their enduring legacy is built not just on the excellence of a single person, but on a constructive competitive culture of collaboration, humility, and continuous learning.

The constructive competition prioritizes the team success over the individual performance, The New Zealand all Blacks team displays the below behaviors that stems out of positive competition Shared Leadership: Leadership is distributed across the team, enabling players to make critical decisions and take ownership of results. This mirrors the principle of 'driving performance and winning together,' where responsibility and recognition are collective.

Mutual Respect and Trust: The All Blacks place a premium on respect—both for teammates and opponents. Every player is seen as essential to the team's mission. This cultural foundation aligns directly with fostering trust and reducing knowledge hiding, as found in [25] Li's (2022) study.

Transparent Communication: Open dialogue is a non- negotiable standard. Post-match reviews focus not on blame, but on what can be learned. This encourages a mindset akin to personal development competition, where the goal is mastery rather than mere victory.

The All-Blacks' success is a testament to how high- performing teams thrive when individual brilliance is harmonized through shared values. By adopting similar behavioral anchors—trust, transparency, and collective recognition—organizations can replicate this cohesion and excellence.
On the contrary All greens Pakistan has always been characterized by individual brilliance of one or two players, seeking to be recognized as example of hyper competition.

They invented the art of reverse swing, to this day, lethal fast bowling has been their fort. There have been wonderful batters who can play spin and fast bowling on their day in any part of the world but hyper competition inside the team has been their undoing, bringing the tag, the most unpredictable team in the world of cricket.

These instances demonstrate how behavior-driven practices are not abstract values but practical levers to steer teams from internal rivalry to collaborative high performance.

Organizations should have a strong culture that promotes positive competition within the organization. Behaviors such as trust and respect each other, Inclusive and take care of each other, drives teams' cohesiveness and positive competition within the team.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings across multiple studies consistently support the hypothesis that within-team competition, if hypercompetitive and unmanaged, leads to diminished empowerment, reduced flexibility, and lower overall performance. The interplay between team dynamics and individual psychology underlines the importance of leadership in setting the tone. Leaders must not only recognize hypercompetition setting in very early and coach and move the team from individual excellence to team excellence but also ensure that such recognition does not compromise team cohesion but builds team cohesion and positive competition

VII. CONCLUSION

In an era where organizational performance hinges on agility, innovation, and collective problem-solving, the cost of unmanaged internal competition is too high. By channeling individual aspirations into collaborative goals and embedding organizational values that prioritize trust, transparency, and shared success, companies can transform potential rivalries into resilient, high-performing teams.

REFERENCES

[1] Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350–383.

[2] West, M. A., & Anderson, N. R. (1996). Innovation in top management teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 81(6), 680–693.

[3] Hackman, J. R. (2002). Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances. Harvard Business Press.

[4] Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization. Harvard Business Review Press.

[5] Salas, E., Sims, D. E., & Burke, C. S. (2005). Is there a "Big Five" in teamwork? Small Group Research, 36(5), 555–599.

[6] Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? Harvard Business Review, 76(6), 93–102.

[7] Baer, M., & Frese, M. (2003). Innovation is not enough: Climates for initiative and psychological safety, process innovations, and firm performance. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 24(1), 45–68.

[8] Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. Psychological Inquiry, 11(4), 227–268.

[9] Grant, A. M., & Parker, S. K. (2009). Redesigning work design theories: The rise of relational and proactive perspectives. Academy of Management Annals, 3(1), 317–375.

[10] Tjosvold, D., Yu, Z. Y., & Hui, C. (2004). Team learning from mistakes: The contribution of cooperative goals and problem-solving. Journal of Management Studies, 41(7), 1223–1245.

[11] Dweck, C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. American Psychologist, 41(10), 1040–1048.

[12] Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350–383.

[13] West, M. A., & Anderson, N. R. (1996). Innovation in top management teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 81(6), 680–693.

[14] Hackman, J. R. (2002). Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances. Harvard Business Press.

[15] Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization. Harvard Business Review Press.

[16] Salas, E., Sims, D. E., & Burke, C. S. (2005). Is there a "Big Five" in teamwork? Small Group Research, 36(5), 555–599.

[17] Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? Harvard Business Review, 76(6), 93–102.

[18] Baer, M., & Frese, M. (2003). Innovation is not enough: Climates for initiative and psychological safety, process innovations, and firm performance. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 24(1), 45–68.

[19] Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. Psychological Inquiry, 11(4), 227–268.

[20] Grant, A. M., & Parker, S. K. (2009). Redesigning work design theories: The rise of relational and proactive perspectives. Academy of Management Annals, 3(1), 317–375.

[21] Tjosvold, D., Yu, Z. Y., & Hui, C. (2004). Team learning from mistakes: The contribution of cooperative goals and problem-solving. Journal of Management Studies, 41(7), 1223–1245.

[22] Dweck, C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. American Psychologist, 41(10), 1040–1048.

[23] Beersma, B., Hollenbeck, J. R., Humphrey, S. E., Moon, H., Conlon, D. E., & Ilgen, D. R. (2003). Cooperation, competition, and team performance: Toward a contingency approach. Academy of Management Journal, 46(5), 572–590.

[24] Ren, S., Mawritz, M. B., Greenbaum, R. L., Babalola, M. T., & Wang, Z. (2024). Does Competitive Action Intensity Influence Team Performance via Leader Bottom-Line Mentality? A Social Information Processing Perspective. Journal of Applied Psychology. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001166

[26] Moczulska, M., Glabiszewski, W., & Grego-Planer, D. (2024). The impact of employee collaboration and competition on teamwork engagement. Current Psychology. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024- 05702-5

[27] Chen, G., Kirkman, B. L., Kanfer, R., Allen, D., & Rosen, B. (2007). A multilevel study of

leadership, empowerment, and performance in teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92(2), 331–346.
[28] Ryckman, R. M., Hammer, M., Kaczor, L. M., & Gold, J. A. (1990). Construction of a hypercompetitive attitude scale. Journal of Personality Assessment, 55(3–4), 630–639.
[25] Li, J. (2022). Personal Competition Among Sports Players and Their Performance as a Team: A Moderated Mediation Model. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 862599.