

COMPETITIVENESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Competition...as American as apple pie. But, is competitiveness in the workplace a good thing? Actually, it depends with whom you are competing. If the competition is between rival companies- definitely, yes. But, if the competition is between employees in the same company, the answer is an absolute no.

What makes competition within an organization a bad thing? Primarily because competitiveness is the antithesis of cooperation, and cooperation is necessary for organizations to win out over rival companies.

When individuals within an organization are competing against each other, the emotional climate of the organization tends to be fear-based. Fearful employees are afraid of making mistakes, which tends to make them afraid to act, period. Employees who are competing against each don't share information that could enrich their organization because they are focused on individual, zero-sum gain.

It seems fairly obvious that cooperation and sharing of information between departments would benefit business. So, why isn't there more cooperation within organizations? Isn't this just common sense? Much of what management consultants typically recommend and teach to companies is not 'rocket science,' but could be labeled as a more 'common sense' approach to business.

According to Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton, authors of [The Knowing-Doing Gap, How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge Into Action](#), "*in organization after organization that failed to translate knowledge into action, we saw a pervasive atmosphere of fear and distrust.*" Pfeffer and Sutton wrote their book because they wanted to understand "*why so many managers who know so much about organizational performance are trapped in firms that do so many things they know will undermine the organization's performance.*"

Pfeffer and Sutton believe the reason that so many organizations have what they coined as a '*knowing-doing gap*' can be attributed to a fear-based business environment. Many people still believe that a good boss is one who might be described as "*tough,*" "*hard-nosed*" or "*mean-spirited.*" Again, according to Pfeffer and Sutton, even *Fortune Magazine* occasionally runs stories on "*the toughest bosses,*" suggesting that in order to be most effective, bosses need to be feared and distrusted. But, how can this be when most companies recognize that employees have great difficulty being led by managers they do not trust?

One explanation may be found in the “X Theory of Management” a belief that unless employees are monitored for organizational compliance and punished for violating those requirements, they will not be motivated to be diligent workers. In recent years, belief in the X Theory of Management has largely been replaced by the “Y Theory of Management.” The Y Theory of Management presumes that employees are intrinsically motivated to do their best, without a need to be ‘whipped into submission’ by management. Despite the fact that the X Theory has been discredited by management experts, the X approach continues to be pervasive and assumed to be effective, despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary.