

# Nice guys can finish first and so can their teams

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Ever thought the other guy was a loser for giving his all for the team even if others weren't pulling their weight?

A new study, published in the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#), says that person can influence a group to become more efficient in achieving its goals by making cooperative, [collective behaviour](#) seem acceptable and appropriate, and thereby encouraging others to act similarly.

The study, authored by a professor at the Rotman School of Management at the [University of Toronto](#) and his collaborator at Northwestern University, calls such individuals "consistent contributors" - [people](#) who contribute all the time, regardless of others' choices.

The findings challenge assumptions made by many game and rational choice theorists that people should cooperate very little in situations with a known end-point when there are short-term incentives to act selfishly.

"It was generally accepted that the unconditional 'always-cooperate' strategy was a dumb strategy," says Mark Weber, an assistant professor of organizational behaviour at Rotman who co-authored the paper with J. Keith Murnighan of the Kellogg School of Management. "The prevailing wisdom in some scholarly circles is that consistent contributors shouldn't exist, that if they do they're "suckers", and that people will exploit them."

"But our study found consistently cooperative actors even in places you might least expect them, and when they're there they seem to set a tone and shape how their fellow group members understand situations," says Prof. Weber. "Their clear, [consistent behavior](#) elicits cooperation, and once you get a few people cooperating with each other, they seem to enjoy cooperating. Groups become more productive, more economically efficient and, anecdotally, people enjoy being a part of them more as a result."

The paper re-analyzed data from two previous experiments by [experimental economists](#) and presented findings from two additional experiments. Participants were given endowments they could keep for themselves or contribute to the group, benefiting everyone. Taken together, the experiments found consistent cooperators commonly emerged, benefited from rather than suffered from their risky actions, and members of their groups cooperated more often than those in groups containing more "rational" actors.

"When you join a new group you have a strategic choice to make - are you going to be a consistent contributor or risk being in a group without one?" says Weber. "Our findings should remind people that they can have a big effect on the groups with which they interact."

Source: University of Toronto

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