# Competition-led performance strategy

## competition's purpose

There are two clear purposes in competition:

1. Discerning through various forms of direct and indirect confrontational engagement the difference between two seemingly comparable natures

2. Elucidating a hierarchy between the various competing natures that may allow for preference in the form of choice based on the pre-eminence of a contest winner

Some might nuance competitive activity by saying that it does not actually compare natures, things, or people, but their performance, quality, strength, etc., and that, as such, the exercise is useful and promotes clarity and opportunity choice within environments where a variety of options are available to potential interested parties.

Under that guise, competition would then be an innocent exercise in clarification. However, it is important to recognise the burden of ownership that is ultimately attached to the natures, persons, individualities producing such performances, and to consider that, though performance may be the foremost factor being compared in the process, nonetheless, the ultimate label (winner/loser) and the selection outcome (in/out) resulting from the comparison and the competition itself, will be inexorably ascribed to their own nature, their person, their individuality; much like the quality or inferiority of a specific product is synonymously and indelibly attached to the brand that markets it.

Simultaneously, the 'apotheosis of success' in competition and the paraphernalia of praise, awards, 'good press', publicity, and renown that inevitably attach themselves to such 'victory' cannot but blur the actual value of the act of winning by exaggerating beyond fact the prominence of 'the winner', be that a product, a service, a company, an institution, a political entity, or a person.

Comparisons are necessarily built into manufactured constructs that, of themselves, delimit true achievement, restrict scope and projection to a measurable distance/gauge, generating a limited ambit, a constrained reference to arbitrary boundaries and therefore curtail much, if not the majority of what could truly be scrutinised were all possibilities and factors allowed for considered within the setting of a comparison and/or a competition.

If increased or improved performance is based on strenuous effort, breakthrough achievements, disruption and breaking the mould of existing limitations, assumptions, frameworks, and or approaches, how can competing to established standards do anything else but inevitably obfuscate and restrict the actual scope of such desired achievement or performance?

## the practice of competition

The practice of competition, as it stands, can be paralleled to the proverbial hitting one's head against a wall because of the effort and resources being utilised and the damage being inflicted ('no pain no gain' proposition), and is based on the belief that such repetitive activity will eventually end up delivering the desired result, that is, breaking through the wall and not, as it is much more likely to effect, the fracturing of one's skull.

The boundaries of the competitive activity, including competitive analysis, are always set within the limits of the imagination of those configuring the events themselves with all the prerogatives, prejudices, and inadequacies that their own vision, experience, the development of their learning, technological prowess, etc. may be able to procure and to progress. The goals set as potential results of these competitions being themselves part of such limited framework.

Deloitte, in the early 2010s, was inspired by a clear-cut statement as to the actual nature of performance assessment:

> *"Although it is implicitly assumed that the ratings measure the performance of the ratee, most of what is being measured by the ratings is the unique rating tendencies of the rater. Thus ratings reveal more about the rater than they do about the ratee."* [1]

As an example, in the field of athletics and high jump in particular, the bar height will have its starting point set at a level wholly designed by the achievement of previous competitors and within certain (evolving) parameters and temporary conditions that effectively restrict the actual performance of the competing athletes to training methods and forms, approaches and facilities that circumscribe the competitive event to elements that can neither be called universal, objective nor can be considered realistic in any logical way.

When high jump competitions did not include the use of a voluminous landing mat, no athlete in their right mind would have attempted a jump that would set them in a trajectory to land on their back or head. So, the sport progressed through various techniques (scissors, straddle, etc.) to achieve higher jump records, superior performance.

Preparation, focus on distinct muscle groups, jumping conditions and other elements of the event were completely different from what they are now. In the same manner, the restrictive nature, required props and preparatory equipment are themselves obstacles limiting a full comparison, a true competition worthy of the name 'world title' and can never allow for an objective competitive event that may truly afford an intellectually or

[1] Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall, Harvard Business Review, (in How People Evaluate Others in Organizations, edited by Manuel London) https://hbr.org/2015/04/reinventing-performance-management

ethically satisfying result, unless of course we are happy to remain entranced by the object/construct of our own creation without reference to the world at large.

In fact, it may be argued that standards and measures, within the context of competition, act as a form of 'gravitational pull' towards under performance. It would be interesting to analyse the performance of elite athletes both in and away from competition, see to what degree they are able to equal or exceed their personal best under the two scenarios and what ratios of overall success such measurements actually deliver.

The practice of auditing to prescribed and industry-approved standards such as ISO, ITIL, Agile, project management methodologies and other similar benchmarks, often predispose organisations throughout their implementation and review cycles, to mindlessly abide by minimum parameters of practice and performance which act both as a common denominator imposed upon the organisation and as a release valve for managers to settle on levels of satisfaction that frequently fall short of excellence in business practice and are used, though not intended to do so, as box-ticking excuses for the lack of imaginative, engaged, and progressive approaches to problem solving, risk mitigation, and even responsible corporate behaviour.

There is much to be said about the ability of a lithe, aware, and awake organisation to respond to inefficacies within, and to deploy, through shared ownership and accountability, the type of watchfulness that is able to alert it to, prompt analysis of, and correct potentially damaging events.

Returning to high jump, the Cuban Javier Sotomayor established the current world record (2.45 metres) in 1993. Before that happened, a change in techniques and the introduction of head-first jumping instead of feet-first jumping (used until the 1960s) only allowed a 7.5% improvement in the height achieved over a period of twenty-nine years (Valeriy Brumel of the Soviet Union jumped 2.28m in 1964 using the feet-first, belly-down technique).

Sotomayor's record has not been surpassed since. This is what Sotomayor said about his strategy and performance during an interview after he set the current world high jump record:

> *"I wanted to set the record here [Salamanca, Spain] because it is a small city in which I feel like I am in Cuba. The people recognize me in the street and ask how I'm doing, the children surround me and I find myself in a good mental state."* [2]

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javier_Sotomayor As we come to the end of the Paris 2024 Olympics, there is still a chance today that an athlete will break Sotomayor's record. However, that fact will only emphasise the shortcomings of that and other competitive events despite the feeling of achievement and success most will derive from it were the record to be broken.

## commercial practice

In commercial practice, this is what is achieved by setting up strategies that allow for business cases and the review of case studies that inexorably lead conscientious staff to research, gather requirements, familiarise themselves with, and refine the relevant corporate elements as they are uniquely put forward by the specific (incomparable) business needs and goals of an operation.

A performing procurement and implementation of a suitable system or product does not depend on a comparative weighing of competing systems or products available in the marketplace, but on the fulfilment and attention to the specifics of definition.

Though the exercise itself may start in an overall comparative review of available products believed to fulfil pre-existing business needs, no actual positive outcome or performance may be achieved by merely appraising generic functionality, past costs, or success ratios in deployment for example, but will be realised instead, by identifying and defining within very particular parameters, by familiarising the teams with what the expected end result is, in its granularity and detail.

It will be the degree of malleability, flexibility, readiness for change, multi-use, configuration, and or modification that will define fitness for purpose, ease of adoption, actual cost of deployment and therefore performance within an enterprise, and not what generic records drawn from comparatively distant and distinct organisations a product may have.

The artisan of old, the artist, the researcher, the developer, and the scientist today have this in common, that in refining, perfecting and pushing the boundaries of their respective crafts, they cannot achieve satisfaction or adequately perform without simultaneously and progressively adapting, reconfiguring, developing, and continuously changing the techniques and approaches they employ together with the tools and parameters for gauging actual success within the realm that only rigorous acquaintance, imaginative freedom, cross-functional, multifaceted learning, and distributive interaction may allow.

Much has been said about the positive nature of constraints and how they may help develop creativity and performance in teams within business. However, when examined carefully, such constraints, be they financial, technical, or human, can only be of tangible use to the creator if they are set within environments where trial and error are an accepted part and parcel of the eventual end result.

Such settings fundamentally liberate the designer/architect/originator allowing for an expansion of their mental, imaginative faculties, especially if enhanced by governance factors like autonomy, transparency, open-ended learning, and free-flowing communication.

Lastly, when terms of comparison are chosen and fixed within a given competitive construct, in a sports' event or in a business tender process for instance, they only gain

significance as a struggle between characters, singularities, nations, the individuality of incomparable objects, beings, ideas and, of necessity, they chart a clear pathway towards and a bias for conflict, a battle for achievement so to speak, to reaching or surpassing the measurable self-imposed distance/time/goal within an artificial construct built to prove what would otherwise be improvable and perhaps even irrelevant.

Even when considering competitive games that have at their base more composite formats, games such as chess that, to a degree, may be understood to yield to highly intricate strategic planning similar perhaps to that of a business management paradigm, even then, when multiple functional pieces, a complex regulatory environment, hierarchies of movement and flexibility result in difficult problem solving scenarios and call for high levels of mental performance, it is clear that the contest is limited to a confined construct, ample yet finite in the number of potential combinations to be played within the 64 square board say, allowing both for a beginning and an end, prescribed by the functionality of each piece as well as their positioning on the chessboard.

We may ask ourselves, what if all chess pieces were assigned the same functionality, if they all functioned as queens or pawns? Thankfully, we have the answer to that question.

The example provided by the game of Go where less regulatory complexity creates a simpler probabilistic array of options is a point in case here. A software program and powerful hardware set up allow for remarkable achievements.

*What is noteworthy is that AlphaGo's algorithms do not contain any genuinely novel insights or breakthroughs. The software combines good old-fashioned neural network algorithms and machine-learning techniques with superb software engineering running on powerful but fairly standard hardware—48 central processing units (CPUs) augmented by eight graphical processing units (GPUs) developed to render 3-D graphics for the gaming communities and exceedingly powerful for running certain mathematical operations.*

*At the heart of the computations are neural networks, distant descendants of neuronal circuits operating in biological brains. Layers of neurons, arranged in overlapping with Night Sight layers, process the input—the positions of stones on the 19 by 19 go board—and derive increasingly more abstract representations of various aspects of the game using something called convolutional networks. This same technology has made possible recent breakout performances in automatic*

*image recognition—automatically labeling, for example, all images posted to Facebook.* [3]

## the contest

However complex, the contest or competition construct remains limited, allowing the computational mind of a machine based on human ideation and an ability to think and programme software conceptually to overcome the mental dexterity of even the champions [4].

But the question still stands: does finding out who has won the contest make us any wiser strategically? Meaning, what has been proven in those decades of research and development that brought about BigBlue or AlphaGo? That a human-controlled machine can beat a single mind? That it has a bigger computational power than that of a human? That it is stronger, bigger, better?

We knew that very well before the research started; a car or a truck do carry more weight than a human-pulled trolley; a human-made bowl can hold more water than a person's cupped hands; and so forth and so on.

Are the challenges, the contests where we can demonstrate we can outdo ourselves real challenges? What do they prove? Do they make the games of chess and go more enjoyable, better?

*It is ironic that the most powerful techniques for this fully deterministic game—in which every move is entirely determined based on earlier moves—are probabilistic, based on the realization that as the vast majority of the branches of the tree can't be feasibly explored, it's best to pick some of the most promising branches almost at random and to evaluate them all the way to the end—that is, to a board position in which either one or the other player wins. The various nodes in the game tree can then be weighted toward those that are most likely to lead to a win. Done over and over again, such a pseudo-random sampling, termed a Monte Carlo tree search, can lead to optimal behavior even if only a tiny fraction of the complete game tree is explored.* [5]

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[3] Koch, Christof, How the computer beat the Go Master, Scientific American, in section 'Looking under the hood', March 19, 2016 https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-computer-beat-the-go-master/

[4] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-39888639/how-a-computer-beat-the-best-chess-player-in-the-world

[5] Koch, Christof, How the computer beat the Go Master, Scientific American, in section 'Looking under the hood', March 19, 2016
https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-computer-beat-the-go-master/

This reminds us of the concept of 'low-hanging fruit' [6] as used in business and uncovers a faculty, now reproduced within an extraordinarily large number of AI applications in process-improvement methodologies, gaming, and commercially-focused activities. It also points to the random nature of the endeavours themselves within the solution proposed by the machine-led approach to winning at go or chess.

Does this mean that more randomness, more frequently is how we achieve performance enhancement? Is the problem set in the first place a valid one? Is the approach substantial, progressive, disruptive or is it just a muscling up of well-proven evidence that does not even exceed historical understanding of human capacity, ability, or intelligence? Does it make us wiser, richer, or just perpetuate the confrontational preference from which we departed?

## competitive environments

Competitive environments cannot accurately reflect the reality or do justice to, say, ongoing business endeavours, enterprise-customer affiliations or even the simplest of sales cycles where relationships go well beyond limited and temporary goals such as closing a sale, providing an instance of customer satisfaction, or preparing for a marketing campaign.

A competition ends and starts again, just like a game, at specific intervals and times. The game of business interaction, patterns of governance and management do not have beginnings or ends per se but depend on vision, belief, analysis, constant and sustainable manoeuvring, planning, and adjustment, tasks that are all intrinsically tied and mutually influencing.

Yet, it appears that by overcoming the inherent mental and physical incapacity humans demonstrate in not being able to compute *ad infinitum* within the constraints of their own natural, even their best trained minds, and by enabling computers to do so on their behalf, there arises a 'reasonable expectation' that performance enhancement in various activities, especially in the majority of commercial activities, will be multiplied, repeatedly improved and exceeded through computation. Thus, the prescience of automation's vast and expansive horizon.

Before the machine was introduced, the results of competitions and, by extension, of comparisons were, at best, exceptions not realisable by the largest possible majority of the natures being compared. They were carried out within artificial environments irreproducible outside the scope, the time, and the resources such events conjured up.

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[6] https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/low-hanging-fruit.asp
"To illustrate the concept of low-hanging fruit, imagine a sales rep has been talking to several prospects, and one seems more likely to buy their product than the others. If the sales rep channels their effort toward the easiest sale, they are focusing on the low-hanging fruit. This is also referred to as cherry-picking clients or opportunities. The term low-hanging fruit can also refer to a problem that is easy to solve. Similarly, if a company implements a strategy to boost sales quickly, rather than enduring an arduous process that takes a long time to produce results, this is also called grabbing the low-hanging fruit."

Has this changed with the introduction of computational power? Who is the consumer of this information? Who processes the results of such sustained performance increases? How much of it can a human individual consume? Is the achievable level of consumption by a human individual on par with the magnitude of the information and sustained performance levels realised through electronic computations?

Admittedly, the volumes of information, the performance enhancement patent in, say, the ability to deliver parcels from point of sale/storage to a specific physical address or the seemingly unlimited availability of information on a certain topic through the world-wide net, could be continually improved and so could performance in terms of error reduction, damage control, etc.

But in its fully-fledged deployment, the new levels of output in performance through machine-led actuations can only be consumed by entities enhanced to a similar level of absorption, that is to say, other machines.

It is difficult to understand what real, consistent advantage, if any, may be drawn by humans from these machine-enabled, heightened performance level scenarios, by the population at large that is (whether business or private), for their individual or group well-being, their improvement, or their growth.

And, simultaneously, it is also reasonable to ask if such demands on performance will not possibly become measures of segregation and further separation between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’, who, for their part, will continue to find the same engagement obstacles in terms of capacity, buying power, and lack of preparedness/access (education) instead of the hoped-for enhancement to their daily lives.

But even then, even if we somehow accept that organised strife and competition represent a valuable and valid proof of exemplariness, quality, or superiority, it is important to realise that the parameters set for performance gauging and comparison, seldom if at all, abide within the necessary conceptual stricture that may deliver results employable in true and realistic scenarios.

To illustrate, still within the field of athletics, and to take the example of sprinting, it may be found that an individual achieves higher speeds if s/he is being chased by a wolf or a lion, a dog or a human aggressor, and that aside from the fact that, under such circumstances a positive result (survival) would be achieved while breaking all existing 100-metre records, this would most probably be never attained on a flat surface or in a straight line.

The performance itself would never be measured as such, and, more importantly, the actual speed achieved in the process would be of little if no relevance to the achievement itself, that is, saving the runner’s life.

In their study Deloitte concluded that:

*Over the past few years the debate about performance management has been characterized as a debate about ratings—whether or not they are fair, and whether or not they achieve their stated objectives. But perhaps the issue is different: not so much that ratings fail to convey what the organization knows about each person but that as presented, that knowledge is sadly one-dimensional. In the end, it's not the particular number we assign to a person that's the problem; rather, it's the fact that there is a single number. Ratings are a distillation of the truth—and up until now, one might argue, a necessary one. Yet we want our organizations to know us, and we want to know ourselves at work, and that can't be compressed into a single number. We now have the technology to go from a small data version of our people to a big data version of them.* [7]

## the competitive landscape

So, to summarise, we have two kids running in the school yard. They aim at catching a loose ball that has been released and lies there in the distance, on the grass, attractive because it will again spur movement, excitement, and the free, self-developmental expense of energy.

The two children vie for the ball. One gets to it first.

What is achieved by one doing so faster than the other?

Is it a feeling of superiority perhaps, of victory, achievement, pride, the ability to show off to others, a personal satisfaction reached on handling something someone else could have had but 'I' got first? Is it the possibility to possess, to hold the lever of control, the power to choose the next action, to start again the race or to conclude the game?

All these assumptions would be true within the current comparative/competitive construct towards which humanity seems so inclined, but are they the principal constituents of activity and growth?

Or is it just a rising to the occasion within the freedom of play and companionship, fun, always alert to the movement of others, always dependent on their reactions, aware of the balance that relationship and cooperation weigh on the setting itself, and ever conscious of the tie between the two, three, four or many more that make up the game that really matters?

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[7] https://hbr.org/2015/04/reinventing-performance-management

It is the game and the other player that matter. Without the game, without the participation of the other child, the energy is diminished, the purpose is confused, the game loses significance, it is no longer game.

But aside from these psychological repercussions, the personality-building factors that ensue competition itself, what is achieved through competition, through comparison?

Just as in business, in politics, and in the animal kingdom's so-called race for food, survival, evolution, a competition result delivers temporary advantage/advancement.

We have grown to choose this framework and strongly prefer it over open cooperation, collaboration, or common/joint effort found in the anonymity of team play, in the game it has been born of.

The artificial necessity to overcome others, counting only the repetition of success in such specialised and very limited activities as accomplishment, only works to emphasise the point that human societies are built upon a strategic model where such comparative and competitive premises take pre-eminence.

What does this mean?

I paraphrase here the words of those more knowledgeable than me, words which have defined the meaning of the competitive construct, its motivation, intention and therefore its trajectory for business of all kinds and society at large:

'Strategy is the thinking process that untangles business constructs with a view to secure managed competitive advantage generating profits.'

It is important to acknowledge that such sought for strategic thinking, even in its most advanced models where computation and applied mathematics attempt to uncover formulae that will deliver better outcomes for society, even there, the experimental results lead us to similar conclusions.

Broseta, Fatas, and Neugebauer start their study 'Asset markets and equilibrium selection in public goods games with provision points: An experimental study' [8] by saying:

> *Public good provision is a fundamental source of market failure, since the non-excludability property of such a good makes it possible to consume it for free, once it is supplied. Thus, in the familiar voluntary contribution mechanism (VCM) model, free riding (i.e., zero contribution) is a dominant strategy and the resulting*

[8] https://web.archive.org/web/20170811102217/http://www.uv.es/fatas/papers/Broseta_Asset_EI_2003.pdf

*equilibrium is socially sub-optimal. The introduction of provision points eliminates the strict dominance of free riding and generates a multiplicity of pure strategy equilibria, which, when symmetric, are Pareto-ranked.* [9]

In an area were the emphasis is to find solutions that will enhance the provision of public good services by experimenting in the use of a combination of private and state-led strategies to eliminate waste and thereby increase the efficiency of public services, the authors find that adding to the strategic equation a level of competition (auctioning individual voluntary contributions [VCM) to the state-provided services) does not necessarily increase the efficiency of the end provision. They write:

*With experimental methods, we studied equilibrium selection in a class of public good games, the VCM with a high provision point. The previous experimental literature on this type of environment concludes that even though initial contribution levels tend to be relatively high, the efficient outcome–the only one in which the public good is provided–is rarely observed, and that the dynamics of players' decisions tend, as the game is repeated, toward the inefficient outcome. These stylized facts are, indeed, replicated in our control treatment.* [10]

Finally, emphasizing the open-ended nature of human behaviour in environments supported by strategies meant to increase the likelihood of effective delivery or provision of services while indirectly acknowledging both the importance of "learning", "individual" action, and multi-party "coordination", Broseta *et al.* conclude:

*As experimental research on public goods with intermediate provision points suggested, coordination problems can arise in these environments as nonsymmetric equilibria might be difficult to sustain. Whether the introduction of auction mechanisms–or of other forms of implicit preplay communication–may help subjects coordinate in environments with intermediate provision points remains an open question. Last but not least, we observe in the initial period of the experiment that 23% of subjects choose an action at the second stage that makes it impossible to recoup the price for the right to play at the first stage. This kind of inconsistent behavior decreases to very low levels in the following periods. The*

[9] Ibid. page 574.
[10] Ibid. page 585.

*decline indicates that some learning is going on. It seems worthwhile to analyze the dynamics of subjects' decisions.* [11]

## winners and losers

From competition we learn two basic premises:

1. The winner is supreme, becomes the centre of attention and the role model to all others,
2. The losers (all those who have not become winners) are not up to the challenge, they are not good enough and therefore not worthy of attention, perhaps even of respect

This is indeed the binary play towards which, through computing especially, we are propelling much of what we call progress in society and where the competition mindset becomes solidified.

There are two computational parts to the result of competitions: the '1' or 'positive', 'in', 'winner', 'advancing' element, together with the corresponding and inevitable '0' or 'negative' because it is without value, it is 'out', 'a loser', or a 'blocked' element.

Is that a realistic or sufficiently complete assessment of the state resulting from competition?

There is the element of time, of timing, also essential in this context. The pressure to effectively deliver a result within a time constraint, unrealistic as it may be, and the so-called rewards, the gain, the profit attached to such successful performance are perhaps the greatest limitations to real learning and improvement, to coordination, cooperation, and actual performance.

In so far as it focuses on preparation of delivery against all odds, in so far as it provokes a totally unrealistic focus on the one activity, silo-like, disengaged from the complexity of the areas of social, business and political life, and in so far as it becomes a pivotal measure of outright accomplishment and role model positioning leading invariably into the temptation (the gravitational pull mentioned earlier) to find shortcuts, performance-enhancing props, etc., competitive activity grows ever nearer the destruction of real learning or progress and edges closer to the annihilation of a realistic, sustainable performance paradigm.

A loser may decide to improve their performance and work harder, more smartly, longer at perfecting their technique, optimising their training, preparations, diet and so forth, to learn from failure. One day, they may become the winner.

However, the scope of such growth architype, again, relies on bars and limits set by whosoever has held the previous record, the highest representation of achievement in that field and that field alone, necessarily curbing performance management within

[11] Ibid. page 586.

such boundaries as are guaranteed to deliver dissatisfying, unsustainable results for the large majority of participants.

## perfect performance

Another way of looking at competition is from the point of view of 'perfection'. Rather than looking at the challenge from the standpoint of what has been achieved, we can always look at it from the prospect of what could be achieved under perfect conditions.

To continue with the example of high jump, what would then be a perfect score? 10 metres? That could be the right measure of perfection if we stand by our own, well-established, mathematical construct: 0 to 1, 1 to 10, 10 to 100 (percentile) scales.

But a 10-metre-high jump seems a little too high perhaps. Should perfection or the maximal achievement/performance to aim for be then set at 3 metres? It would certainly be more feasible, in theory (perhaps science says otherwise) ...

The current de facto perfect score for high jump is 2.46 metres as it is this that all high jump athletes have as their goal when competing officially. If anyone can exceed 2.45 metres, the joy, the satisfaction, the fame, and the profit that come with it will surely signify the attainment of perfection at least temporarily.

Yet, this remains far from representing true perfection, doesn't it? When we choose to aim at perfection, at the highest achievement and strongest performance, all current records, wins, victories in competitions, whatever their nature, will perforce be seen as falling well short of it.

Looking down from the perfection viewpoint, even one that is measured at 10 or to just 3 metres in height, will reveal clearly and swiftly that we can all high jump within very similar performance ratios. That is, there are no clear winners since we all fare similarly in failing to achieve perfection.

The ratio increase between 2.45 and 3 metres is 22.4%. That is well over double the increase in high jump achieved over the last half century. During my school years, I remember once jumping 1.92 metres which is 27.6% away from Sotomayor's current world record and 56.2% away from 3 metres.

If we consider my performance to be representative of that of a typical human and, in turn, average it together with Sotomayor's, that gives us a mean height of 2.185 metres which is 37.3% away from the 3 metres level of perfection we've given ourselves in this exercise.

It is clear then, that on average, the human race's overall record of performance in high jump is well removed from any closeness to the lowest perfection level we can reasonably countenance (3 metres) and that the singularity of those exceptions that do exist cannot in any way be representative of, nor can they be simulated or achieved by the typical human.

What is then the benefit of placing such levels of emphasis, elation, and reward on these achievements?

To further emphasise the dissonance, Sotomayor, standing at 1.95 metres tall, achieved a jump 25.6% higher than his own stature with his record. Red kangaroos can grow up to 2 metres in height and jump up to 3 metres vertically on their two hind legs, that is 50% above their own height. There are many other examples of cross-species comparisons that could be brought into the discussion. Any measure of comparison we attempt, as seen here, even among humans alone, is inoperable and devoid of real/relevant performance meaning.

The question therefore remains true, what is in fact the construct we are comparing ourselves within? Is it a valid construct?

## strategy

If this is true, wholistic performance – wholistic in the sense that its achievements do not perpetuate conflict with the foundational, organic elements in our environment (humans included) – is to be achieved, then competition must give way to cooperation first, to close association, to the re-setting of priorities that maximise cohesion and common wealth as against the gravitational force of time-constrained, blinkered activity purely bent on temporary advantage acquisition.

Richard Bordenave has also spoken about the concept of “company gravity”, its origins, consequences, and the necessity to revamp company culture if true customer orientation is to be achieved effectively. He writes:

> *Beyond these examples, we mapped many other components of company gravity. Their influence varies according to the companies or services audited: ego bias, overconfidence, social norm, emotional bias, relational traps ... Knowing those who dominate in their own organization is often a first step towards transformation. Indeed, to put oneself in the customer's shoes, one must first learn to leave one's own. The second step is to set the organization in motion starting from its actions, because words are not enough. By establishing simple rituals, a favorable working environment and customer-oriented processes with employees, it is possible to act sustainably on customer centric behaviors. And it is through coaching that we create this ability to shift focus from one's own role to take a customer-oriented perspective, even within the higher management structures of the company. After the diagnosis comes stretching! Because it is thanks to the flexibility that each one acquires in this sequential de-centring that*

*the organization develops a lasting empathy towards the customer, and is able to compensate for "company gravity".* [12]

In their 'radical redesign' of performance measurement and management Deloitte identified four criteria to reshape existing performance-related staff interaction and data gathering mechanisms. Among these, perhaps the most important one is that of increased and highly frequent communication between those who measure performance and those who are being measured.

Emphasis on in-depth understanding of team members' strengths and on the agility required in enabling collaborative conversations leading to increased, progressive performance relies not on numbers-led competitive assessment but on a self-effacing proclivity towards understanding the other and creating cooperative growth patterns. It is this criterion that overwhelmingly drives performance. Deloitte's research points out:

*In effect, we are asking our team leaders what they would do with each team member rather than what they think of that individual. When we aggregate these data points over a year, weighting each according to the duration of a given project, we produce a rich stream of information for leaders' discussions of what they, in turn, will do—whether it's a question of succession planning, development paths, or performance-pattern analysis.*

and

*If you want people to talk about how to do their best work in the near future, they need to talk often. And so far we have found in our testing a direct and measurable correlation between the frequency of these conversations and the engagement of team members. Very frequent check-ins (we might say radically frequent check-ins) are a team leader's killer app.* [13]

Therefore, to push forward the consequences of the above analysis, competition must become a second tier, possibly a third tier priority in our lives, relegated to what it actually is, a source of entertainment, combative and restrictive, damaging in many instances, and must give way to equal efforts towards creativity in the expanding impetus that life lived in community evidently offers, unshackled as it should be from the ties of overdeveloped personal and corporate self-indulgence and greed.

Within societies that value human interaction and the needs of the individual, and where coexistence, environmental awareness and protection, participation, collaboration, equality of opportunity and justice before the law are promoted, business

[12] The original French article can be found online in the Harvard Business Review. https://www-hbrfrance-fr.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.hbrfrance.fr/chroniques-experts/2019/11/28549-pour-etre-plus-customer-centric-luttez-contre-la-company-gravity/?amp=1

[13] https://hbr.org/2015/04/reinventing-performance-management

ventures will continue to struggle with sustainability, cost management, productivity, and individuals' autonomy unless they adapt the conceptualisation and scope of their goals to a reality that moves further away from an adversarial culture, away from competition and conflict as foundation.

Instead, society(ies) must take decisive steps towards an understanding of performance that opens up propositions centred on the achievement of excellence firmly linked to the reduction of waste and the harmonisation of products, processes and systems with the social reality wherefrom they draw their resource, their health, and their creativity.