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## University's study shows the reality of co-operation

A NEW study by Edinburgh University researchers has confirmed what fans of reality TV shows already know - people co-operate when it suits them, but put the boot in when it doesn't.

The study showed that individuals will work as part of a team to outsmart opponents, but co-operate less when they think they are competing against each other. The findings were based on a series of experiments in which participants were offered cash incentives to help others.

The study was aimed at explaining the puzzle of why some species carry out costly co-operative behaviour which benefits other individuals, even though the Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest suggests they should look after their own interests.

It was based on the results of a classic game of bluff called the Prisoner's Dilemma, in which players mimic the behaviour of two criminals, who can either "co-operate" by remaining silent about a joint crime or "defect" by incriminating the other.

The Edinburgh study is the first to measure levels of co-operation between opposing groups and within teams of players. Students played the game in small groups, with cash rewards to encourage competition between groups and within groups.

The researchers found that when competition was between groups, the top scores in the room won money, which led to co-operation within teams.

But when competition was within groups, the top players in each group won money, which led to selfish conflict within teams.

Dr Stuart West, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Biological Sciences, said: "The study shows that when individuals have to compete within groups, cooperation becomes less likely."

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