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The Contingent Effects of Intrateam Abusive Behavior on Team Thriving and New Venture Performance

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This study sheds light on the dark side of entrepreneurship by examining how and under what conditions abusive behavior within new venture teams (NVTs) relates to new venture performance. Using a national (USA) random sample of NVTs, we find that the relationship of intrateam abusive behavior (i.e., degree to which NVT members exhibit "hostile" verbal behaviors toward each other) with new venture performance (i.e., sales and employment growth) is mediated by NVT thriving (i.e., level of vitality and learning exhibited within the NVT). Results further demonstrate that perceived competitive intensity of the industry moderates this relationship, with the indirect effect of intrateam abusive behavior on new venture performance (via thriving) being significantly less negative at high, than at low, levels of competitive intensity. We therefore conclude that perceived competitive threats to the survival of startups act to mitigate the otherwise deleterious effects of abusive behavior occurring within NVTs. These results broaden existing knowledge regarding the dark side of entrepreneurship by expanding the conversation on this topic to include the NVT and providing evidence for why some NVTs, but not others, are able to sustain the growth of their firms despite the occurrence of abusive behavior between their members.

Keywords: *abusive supervision; firm performance; leadership; team dynamics; top management teams; upper echelons*

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[Founders] They not only abuse their employees but often even do it to themselves in the name of startups. That is how a startup is supposed to behave. They believe that if they, and everyone working with them, are not putting their heart and soul and blood and sweat and tears into building the next greatest thing on earth—they are not doing a good job. These are unrealistic expectations and failing to meet these expectations often leads to abuse.

—Ravi Handa

Stories regarding unfettered acts of abusive behavior (i.e., displays of hostile verbal behavior, excluding physical contact; defined here as *intrateam abusive behavior* when referenced as occurring laterally between team members) exhibited within new venture teams (NVTs) (i.e., the group of individuals that acts as the leadership team and is chiefly responsible for the strategic decision making and ongoing operations of a new venture; Klotz et al., 2014) have long been common in popular culture. For example, movies such as *Startup.com*, *Pirates of Silicon Valley*, and *The Social Network* depict patterns of abusive behavior within NVTs. Moreover, a wide range of books documenting the inner workings of high-profile startups such as Amazon, Apple, Tesla, and Theranos have highlighted the common nature of abusive behavior within the upper echelons of these organizations, particularly during the early stages of their development (Carreyrou, 2018; Isaacson, 2011; Stone, 2014; Vance, 2015). Despite the obvious downside implications of such mistreatment, some startups exhibit a tolerance for abusive behaviors enacted by NVT members—sustaining their development and growth over time.

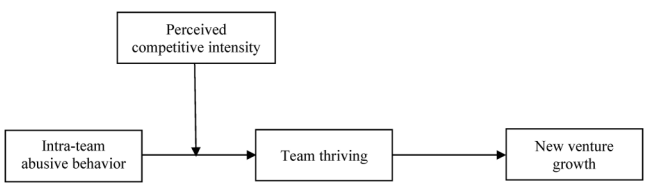
The occurrence of abusive behavior among persons leading new ventures has been characterized as the dark side of entrepreneurship (Kets de Vries, 1985) but has received little scholarly attention within the context of NVTs. Such a dearth of research is surprising given the crucial role that NVTs play in the development and growth of startups (Ensley et al., 2002; Klotz et al., 2014). In like manner, Blatt (2009: 533) has observed that "… research is needed that focuses more sharply on how the quality of relationships between team members affects a team's ability to build a successful new business." Put another way, one might ask: Why are some startups, but not others, able to develop and grow despite the occurrence of intrateam abusive behavior within their NVTs?

In response, the current research considers how abusive behavior (within NVTs) is related to new venture growth and under what conditions this relationship is more or less detrimental. We draw from and extend contemporary theory regarding the socially embedded nature of thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005) to advance a model depicting *team thriving* (i.e., a motivational concept comprised of a shared sense of vitality and collective learning orientation) as a generative mechanism linking intrateam abusive behavior and new venture growth. We focus on team thriving as a mediating mechanism because its elements (i.e., vitality and learning) are needed for NVTs to effectively progress with the development and growth of their startups. For example, without a sense of vitality, teams lack the energy to persist in the face of challenging situations. In addition, without learning, teams will be unable to make sense of changes taking place in their environment and innovate accordingly. Importantly, effective adaptation to one's environment jointly requires *both* vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Moreover, workplace mistreatment among colleagues (such as intrateam abusive behavior) has been specified as a relational factor that can inhibit thriving (Kleine et al., 2019).[1] Taken together, intrateam abusive behavior is anticipated to reduce

team thriving and—in turn—new venture growth. Following recommendations of Tepper et al. (2017) to examine contextual factors that may mitigate abusive behavior's negative effects and by Kleine et al. (2019) for research to investigate when thriving is able to persist in the presence of interpersonal adversity, we further theorize that the degree of *competitive intensity* perceived to be present in the industry environment (Covin & Slevin, 1989) moderates the indirect (mediated) effect of intrateam abusive behavior on new venture growth via team thriving. Perceived competitive intensity is selected as the primary moderating variable within our conceptual model based on extensive theoretical arguments and empirical evidence demonstrating that external competition (To et al., 2020) and/or common enemies (De Jaegher & Hoyer, 2016) can bring individuals together in ways that allow them to overcome interpersonal differences in order to rise to the occasion and prevent potential losses (Zhang et al., 2017). Through our examination of this moderating variable, we add further contextual nuance to Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work—which asserts that thriving can continue to take place in the face of adversity. Specifically, we suggest that the perceived competitive intensity of a new venture's industry environment should act as a salient threat that buffers the (internal) deleterious effects of intrateam abusive behavior within NVTs. When competitive intensity is high and perceptions of external threats exist, the deleterious effects accompanying intrateam abusive behavior will likely be minimized and/or compartmentalized given the pressing need to refocus attention toward overcoming the existing external threats. In sum, by considering NVT thriving as an intervening mechanism and perceived competitive intensity as a boundary condition in our conceptual model, we evaluate two important constructs that may aid in understanding *how* and *under what conditions* abusive behavior within NVTs impacts the development and growth of their firms. Our full conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.

The current study contributes to knowledge regarding the dark side of entrepreneurship (Shepherd, 2019), while also informing research on workplace thriving (Kleine et al., 2019). Even though a majority of new ventures are founded by teams (Klotz et al., 2014), the literature on the dark side of entrepreneurship has focused primarily on the antisocial personality traits of individual entrepreneurs (e.g., narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellians; Anglin et al., 2018; Hmieleski & Lerner, 2016; Klotz & Neubaum, 2016). Far less attention has been placed on aversive (or hostile) *behaviors*. We advance this literature by examining abusive behavior exhibited within NVTs and by considering under what conditions such behavior has its greatest effect on objective measures of new venture growth. Shedding light on these issues is particularly important if one considers that NVT dynamics are

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



oftentimes imprinted onto new ventures, especially early on in their development (e.g., shaping behavioral norms and organizational culture) and in ways that are difficult to later change (Leung et al., 2013).

The present research in turn contributes to the literature on workplace thriving. A central component of Spreitzer et al.'s (2005: 538) socially embedded model of thriving is that "thriving can occur with or without adversity." In other words, adverse conditions are thought to prevent thriving from increasing but not to necessarily diminish current levels of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2012). On this basis, Kleine et al. (2019: 990) expected to find "a zero relationship between negative events and thriving" in their meta-analysis of the thriving literature. Instead, they found workplace mistreatment—a key relational component of the socially embedded model of thriving (see Spreitzer et al., 2005)—to be negatively related to thriving. Thus, our study has the potential to inform Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) model by exploring a contextual contingency (or buffering effect) through which such null effects might be observed. Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) seminal work also called for research examining thriving's effects at higher levels of analysis. According to these scholars, "it is likely that unit thriving is more than a collection of thriving individuals. For example, for units to thrive, individual thriving cannot occur at the expense of others or the learning and vitality of the collective" (Spreitzer et al., 2005: 546). More recently, Kleine et al. (2019) reaffirmed this call when noting there have been few studies at the team or unit level. In response, the current study aims to assist in understanding thriving's role at higher levels of analysis (i.e., beyond individuals) by taking an upper echelons perspective as it relates to the functioning and effectiveness of NVTs.

Abusive Behavior Within NVTs

NVT members must act interdependently to develop and grow their firms (Hambrick et al., 1996). Shaw (1981: 150) observed, for example, that if a leadership team "is to function effectively, its members must be able to communicate easily and efficiently." This point is especially salient for NVTs charged with leading their startup firms. Such teams have little margin for error—generally possessing limited slack resources (George, 2005), operating with few norms or procedures to guide their actions (de Jong et al., 2013), and facing high odds of failure (Headd, 2001). Indeed, Ensley et al. (2002) have argued that NVTs are the ultimate source of accountability for their firms' success or failure. This heavy reliance on NVTs can create a context that depletes its members' psychological (Baron, 2008), physical (Rahim, 1996), and financial resources (Harrison et al., 2004). As a result, NVT members are particularly susceptible to experiencing pressure, distress, task overload, and frustration (Baron, 1998)—factors that have been found to encourage acts of abuse toward coworkers (Tepper et al., 2017).

Defining Intrateam Abusive Behavior

We conceptualize mistreatment among NVT members as *intrateam abusive behavior*, defined as the degree to which team members exhibit displays of hostile verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact, toward each other. Our conceptualization shifts Tepper's (2000) description of abusive supervision from vertical (i.e., hierarchical) interactions between supervisors and subordinates to lateral interactions that take place across NVT

members. Similar to other forms of mistreatment occurring within a bounded or collective context, intrateam abusive behavior is envisaged to originate from individuals' abusive acts but materializes as a team attribute through members' mutual interactions (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000) and social learning processes (Tepper et al., 2017). Felps et al. (2006), for example, describe how it takes only one abusive member to be a catalyst for team-level dysfunction. These authors observed that, in most instances, such scenarios play out when a team's members lack the availability of constructive responses (e.g., ability to remove an abusive member). As a result, the most common recourse for its members is to react defensively, with such responses usually failing to resolve the abuse experienced. Instead, intrateam abusive behavior may intensify and spread as members not only defend themselves (e.g., tit-for-tat spirals; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) but also come to believe that it is acceptable to engage in abusive behavior (Tepper et al., 2017).[2] For instance, abusive behavior within NVTs is something that entrepreneurs have become known to occasionally boast about (Handa, 2018), and some individuals believe that abusive behavior is necessary in order to push others to produce their very best work (Watkins et al., 2019).

Distinguishing Intrateam Abusive Behavior From Related Constructs

To clarify our articulation of intrateam abusive behavior as a unique construct, we distinguish it from potentially similar forms of behavior. Notably, intrateam abusive behavior is differentiated from both individual-level conceptualizations of abusive supervision as well as group-level descriptions of abusive supervision climate (Priesemuth et al., 2014). In each of these related instances, the hostile behavior originates from a single source and is expressed downward from a supervisor to subordinates rather than originating and being expressed laterally among a team's members. Conceptually, intrateam abusive behavior also differs from team relationship (or affective) conflict (i.e., the presence of interpersonal differences among team members, which often involves annoyance, tension, and animosity; Jehn, 1995). Specifically, abusive behavior (e.g., yelling or ridicule) can occur even in the absence of any underlying or preexisting interpersonal differences between NVT members. In addition, team relationship conflict does not necessarily involve abuse (e.g., relationship tension may result in frustration without escalating into abusive behavior). Intrateam abusive behavior, as conceptualized here, also differs from dysfunctional team behavior (i.e., observable, motivated—but not illegal—behavior by an employee or group of employees that is intended to impair team functioning; Cole et al., 2008). Even though intrateam abusive behavior may impair team functioning, logic suggests that NVT members engaging in such behavior do not necessarily *intend* to impair team functioning at the expense of their startup's survival. They may, for instance, simply be acting out abusively as a means of "blowing off steam." For a similar reason, intrateam abusive behavior differs from social undermining in teams (i.e., behavior intended to hinder the ability of others to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships; Duffy et al., 2012). For example, yelling and scolding others might be used to "push" or "motivate" team members to perform better rather than to undermine their efforts. Finally, intrateam abusive behavior differs from work group aggression (i.e., efforts by individuals to harm others with whom they work or the organizations in which they are employed; Glomb & Liao, 2003) in that intrateam abusive behavior, as noted earlier, lacks the explicit *intent* to harm—an elemental aspect of

workplace aggression. We now describe the socially embedded model of thriving at work and explain why we draw from this perspective to develop our conceptual model linking intrateam abusive behavior with new venture growth.

The Socially Embedded Model of Thriving at Work as a Theoretical Framework

Developed by Spreitzer et al. (2005: 538), the socially embedded model of thriving at work positions thriving as "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work." A key element of this definition is that vitality and learning are *jointly* needed in order to benefit from the thriving experience. Learning cannot meaningfully occur when the energy of individuals is depleted. Conversely, individuals can feel energized, but without learning, they will not consider themselves to be progressing in their work roles. Thriving has played a central role in the positive organizational behavior literature as a "state-like" motivational resource that fosters agentic behavior and leads to improved health, positive attitudes, and enhanced performance (Kleine et al., 2019). Importantly, with respect to the current research, thriving can be experienced by individuals or materialize at higher units of analysis (Spreitzer et al., 2005) and assume an "a posteriori permanence that can subsequently influence individuals and collective action" (Morgeson & Hofman, 1999: 253). In other words, thriving acts as a positive enabler of adaptation to one's environment. This point is particularly relevant for the study of thriving within the context of NVTs, which generally share a primary goal of developing and growing their new ventures (Klotz et al., 2014).

Spreitzer et al. (2005: 539) argue that thriving is socially embedded because vitality "comes from relational connections with others" and "learning does not happen solely in the individual mind or in isolation from others." In later work (Spreitzer et al., 2012: 159), they go on to observe that interpersonal mistreatment among colleagues is likely to limit the experience of thriving, noting that the targets of abuse are "more likely to narrow their focus to the task at hand" and thus "avoiding risk that might offer opportunities to learn." Likewise, Kleine et al.'s (2019) elaboration of the socially embedded model of thriving highlights interpersonal mistreatment as the only relational factor to hinder gains in thriving. They argue that when experiencing workplace mistreatment "cognitive resources are often redirected toward the incident instead of on performing tasks or acquiring new skills," and therefore, the targets "are more likely to experience negative emotions, and thus, are unlikely to feel vital or experience learning at work" (Kleine et al., 2019: 978). In short, the socially embedded model of thriving at work suggests a likely linkage between intrateam abusive behavior and NVT thriving—which, in turn, relates to the ability of NVTs to adapt and grow their firms. We therefore position team thriving as the main mediating mechanism in our study linking NVT intrateam abusive behavior with new venture growth.

Hypothesis Development

Linking Intrateam Abuse to New Venture Growth via Team Thriving

The experience of intrateam abuse is anticipated to impair three NVT processes directly relevant to the thriving experience: task focus, exploration, and heedful relating (Spreitzer

et al., 2005). First, when abusive behavior occurs within the NVT, members' focus will likely shift from completing work-related tasks and toward efforts meant to bring the abusive perpetrator(s) back into alignment with norms for civility. To the extent that these efforts persist, the probability of task execution lessens as NVTs become preoccupied with "handling" the abusive member(s) and thus distracted from purposeful goal pursuit—an effect otherwise known as *control precedence* (Frijda, 1986). Second, the depleting effects of abusive behavior are likely to refocus NVT members' attention toward self-preservation (i.e., shielding themselves from the observed or experienced abuse) and away from explorative activities (e.g., risk-taking, discovery, and innovative behavior; Brockner et al., 2004). Finally, intrateam abusive behavior is anticipated to fragment NVTs rather than promote heedful relating (i.e., operating attentively to the needs of others). The natural result of this circumstance is that NVT members will experience psychological withdraw and invest less in other members' needs (Tepper et al., 2007).

In turn, Spreitzer et al. (2005) suggest two ways that a shared sense of thriving may positively relate to the performance of firms. First, as levels of NVT thriving increase (as opposed to those NVTs experiencing intrateam abuse), its members are in an enhanced mode of learning and are building expertise, which is a foundation of innovative strategic behavior (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009). Further, to the extent that NVTs are in a learning-orientation, they will look beyond routine task requirements as a means of acquiring new knowledge aimed at helping their firms succeed (Zellmer-Bruhn & Gibson, 2006). In support of this view, it is argued that without a thriving "community at the top, an organization cannot effectively develop and exploit new knowledge" (Ling et al., 2008: 559). Second, a thriving NVT is one that is in a state of feeling strong and active, and this shared sense of vitality should provide motivational force that enhances task accomplishment and, thereby, increase firm growth. Indeed, a mounting body of research indicates that when teams experience vitality they are able to achieve higher levels of performance (Quinn & Dutton, 2005). In part, this is because when NVTs experience vitality, thought-action repertoires are expanded as members engage in novel, varied, and exploratory behaviors as a means to assimilate information from disparate sources (Fredrickson, 2001).

In sum, NVT thriving is anticipated to act as a linking mechanism that connects intrateam abusive behavior with the NVTs' ability to produce high levels of new venture growth. Specifically, we predict that intrateam abusive behavior will reduce NVTs' ability to thrive, and in turn, lower team thriving is anticipated to negatively affect new venture growth.

Hypothesis 1: Intrateam abusive behavior exhibited by NVTs will have a negative indirect effect (via NVT thriving) on new venture growth.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Competitive Intensity

When placed in context, Tepper et al. (2017) have observed that not all acts of abusive behavior are likely to lower performance. Similarly, Spreitzer et al. (2005) speculate that thriving may be able to occur in the presence of adverse conditions. In the context of startups, one such instance may be when NVTs are faced with intense industry competition that poses a tangible threat to the survival of their firms. As we detail below, when external competition

becomes a significant threat to the survival of a startup, two related mechanisms should help to minimize (or buffer) the deleterious effects of intrateam abusive behavior on NVTs' ability to thrive.

First, from an appraisal perspective, high levels of perceived competitive intensity will take precedence over abusive behavior that is internal to NVTs, prompting them to focus their energies and fight for the survival of their firms. This phenomenon is rooted in evolutionary survival instincts. For example, in discussing the importance of an "us vs. them" mentality, Blader and Tyler (2009) reason that when high levels of external competition are present, acts of abusive behavior between team members will have less impact on performance because members are focused on defeating their competitors. Wolff and Pett (2006) likewise note that NVTs, despite ongoing interpersonal friction, are more likely to band together if they fear losing all that they have sacrificed to make their startups successful. In a similar vein, Hambrick (1994: 192) suggests that when competitive intensity is perceived to be high and the situation is stressful, the need for coordination and discourse necessitates that top management "come together, often face to face, relatively frequently to debate and orchestrate" their next strategic moves. Indeed, the perceived presence of intense competition has been shown in prior research to band together "in groups" that may otherwise be experiencing internal dysfunction in order to guard against threats from an "out-group" (e.g., Zhang et al., 2017). Put simply, in order to survive, NVT members must quickly shift from being offended by acts of abuse internal to the team and redirect their efforts toward defeating their competition. As these ideas suggest, intense industry competition is likely to tap into the basic survival instincts of NVT members, energizing them to jointly develop and execute strategies aimed to hold off or defeat their competition.

Second, from an attribution perspective, NVT members are likely to associate intrateam abusive behavior with the stressful conditions brought about by the perceived threat of industry competition and, therefore, ignore or excuse the abusive perpetrator(s) and their bad behaviors. This logic is consistent with research demonstrating that salient environmental stimuli attract attention that disproportionately influences individuals' causal attributions (Fiske et al., 1982). Intense competition as perceived by an NVT provides a sense of purpose, thereby offering NVT members a viable outlet to redirect any experienced hostility that may result from the perceived violation of civility norms (Becker, 1969). Further, intense competition provides an outlet of blame for all that is wrong, including NVT members' negative comments and ridicule. It follows that the salience of perceived competitive intensity will thus reduce any tension created by acts of abuse that are internal to the NVT as opposed to the abusive behavior acting as a compounding stressor. Consequently, when abusive behaviors are present and competitive intensity is high, NVTs are likely motivated to overlook abusive outbursts as they focus their efforts on ensuring the development and growth of their startups.

We therefore predict that the adverse consequences of intrateam abusive behavior on thriving will be attenuated or weakened when NVTs perceive the industry environment to be relatively high in competitive intensity. Alternatively, when the industry environment is perceived as being relatively low in competitive intensity, NVTs experience less external pressure as compared to NVTs operating in highly competitive industries (Lindelöf & Löfsten, 2006). The lack of external competition permits NVT members to focus their

attention inwardly toward reconciling relationships between abusive NVT members, retaliating against the abusive NVT perpetrator(s), and/or disengaging from their roles within the team. Under such conditions, intrateam abusive behavior will take its toll on NVTs because such negative experiences are draining—thus hindering vitality and learning (Levine & Moreland, 1990). As such, the negative effects of intrateam abusive behavior on NVT thriving will be greatest when the industry environment is perceived as being low in competitive intensity.

In sum, Hypothesis 1 predicts that the effects of NVTs' intrateam abusive behavior on new venture growth will be transmitted through NVT thriving (i.e., a mediated relationship). We further hypothesize that perceived competitive intensity interacts with intrateam abusive behavior to predict NVT thriving (i.e., a moderated relationship). Taken together, our predictions constitute a "first stage" moderated mediation model (Hayes, 2018) in which competitive intensity conditionally influences the strength of the indirect effect between intrateam abusive behavior and new venture growth (as depicted in Figure 1).

Hypothesis 2: The perceived level of competitive intensity present within the industry environment will moderate the strength of the indirect relationship between intrateam abusive behavior exhibited by NVTs and new venture growth (via NVT thriving), such that the negative indirect effect will become weaker (less negative) as competitive intensity increases.

Methods

Data Collection Procedures

We created a national (USA) stratified random sample of 2,000 startups using the *Dun and Bradstreet's Market Identifiers* database. In order to be included in our sample, a firm had to be operating for 3 years or less and have four or more employees. *Dun and Bradstreet* provided the names and addresses of the firms and their CEOs. Although collecting data via CEO surveys is difficult (Cycyota & Harrison, 2006), we focused on CEOs because they are commonly a founding member of the new venture and are well-informed about matters such as NVT processes and firm performance (Simsek et al., 2005). A personalized packet including a cover letter, the research survey, and a prepaid return envelope was sent to CEOs of the sampled startups. The cover letter explained that the research was focused on the dynamics of NVTs and the performance of their startups. Using this prompt, we sought to orient the CEO participants toward answering survey items as they pertain to the NVT as a unit rather than to themselves as individuals. In total, 484 packets were returned as nondeliverable. The number of nondeliverable mailings is consistent with *Dun and Bradstreet* estimates that, within a given year, 20% of companies in their database change addresses. A total of 183 completed CEO surveys were received, each from a different firm. Of these, four firms were removed—two because of incomplete data and two due to firms reporting that they were led by a single CEO without a NVT. Therefore, the response rate for firms was 11.8%, which is similar to prior research using samples of top management (Ling et al., 2008).

We followed a key informant sampling process (see, e.g., Datta et al., 2005), such that once completed surveys were returned from "primary" informants (i.e., the CEOs), additional

survey packets were sent for distribution to other NVT members to serve as "secondary" informants. In total, we received surveys completed by secondary informants from 35 firms (i.e., 2 responses from 18 firms, 3 responses from 13 firms, and 4 responses from 4 firms). The secondary NVT member responses were used along with the primary responses from CEOs to estimate interrater agreement (IRA) indices for each focal variable. The IRA estimates indicate a high consistency among the primary (i.e., the CEOs) and secondary informants (i.e., NVT members).[3] With strong IRA indicating a high degree of interchangeability between raters, no systematic bias appears to exist for the CEO responses as compared to the NVT member responses.[4]

Sample

The majority of CEO respondents (i.e., primary informants) were founders of their firms (67%), male (76%), and, on average, 48 years old. A typical firm was 2 years old and employed approximately 50 individuals. The firms in the final sample were from 42 different states and had primary operations in various industries (i.e., 97 different industries at the 4-digit level of North American Industry Classification System). Consistent with a national random sample, the greatest number of responses came from the most populated states (e.g., 33 firms from Texas, 23 firms from California). The potential for representation bias was examined by using data available in the *Dun and Bradstreet* database, including gender of CEOs, firm age, annual sales, number of employees, and firm growth. The results were nonsignificant in each case, suggesting that our sample is representative of the general population of firms from which it was drawn.

Measures

All measures were rated on a 5-point response scale, such that response options ranged from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). Each item was framed as an "informant" item rather than as a "respondent" item. Informant items require the individual to evaluate and provide ratings on team properties they experience together rather than their own personal behaviors or attitudes (cf. Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980). Items for all focal measures are shown in Appendix A.

Intrateam Abusive Behavior ($\alpha = 0.90$). A measure of intrateam abusive behavior was developed by adapting five items from Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision measure. Following Mitchell and Ambrose (2007), we focused on items that represented active, rather than passive, abusive behaviors that are willfully hostile.[5] The items were modified such that a referent-shift was applied (Chan, 1998). Responses were summed and averaged, with higher scores indicating a greater level of intrateam abusive behavior.

Team Thriving ($\alpha = 0.91$). Team thriving was measured by adapting six items from Porath et al.'s (2012) 10-item thriving measure. Three items from each of thriving's two dimensions, vitality and learning, were included. We again modified the referent to reflect the NVT as a whole. In line with Porath et al.'s conceptualization of thriving, CEO responses were summed and averaged to form a global team thriving score. Cognizant of psychometric concerns

related to trimmed or shortened measures, we collected additional survey data from 205 individuals who were active members of workplace teams. Items were adapted to the team level to mirror the data used in the current study. In comparing the trimmed six-item thriving measure used in the current survey with the full 10-item measure of thriving developed by Porath et al. (2012), we found the two measures to be highly correlated ($r = 0.95$, $p < 0.01$). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0.87 and 0.91, respectively, for the 6-item and 10-item measures. Thus, taking measurement error into consideration, the trimmed and full measure are nearly perfectly correlated.

Perceived Competitive Intensity ($\alpha = 0.77$). This variable was assessed using 5 items adapted from Miller and Friesen (1982). Consistent with prior research (e.g., Covin & Slevin, 1998), we treated this variable as a continuous score ranging from low to high in competitive intensity; thus, responses were summed and averaged, such that a higher score indicated a higher perceived level of competition between firms within an industry.

New Venture Growth. The rate of firm growth is a common and relevant indicator of new venture performance, and achieving such growth is a primary goal of entrepreneurs (Brush & Vanderwerf, 1992). Given our research questions, rate of growth is an ideal outcome variable because it is an equally relevant indicator of firm performance in both hostile and benign industry environments (Covin & Slevin, 1998). We therefore used sales and employment growth as indicators of performance. To compute rate of growth, we acquired sales and employment totals from *Dun and Bradstreet* at two points in time: the year in which the survey was administered (t_0) and again 2 years afterward ($t_{+2\ \text{years}}$). Growth for each variable was calculated as the lagged percentage change over this 2-year period. Sales and employment growth data at $t_{+2\ \text{years}}$ were not available for three firms. Consistent with Baum and Locke (2004), because we were not able to confirm what happened to these firms (e.g., if they went out of business, merged with other firms, changed names, etc.), we assigned zero percent sales and employment growth to them.[6] As both growth indexes were positively skewed, we followed prior research and used the logarithmic value of each index in our analyses (Baum et al., 2001).

Control Variables. Data relating to seven potential covariates were used as control variables. *Team interdependence* ($\alpha = 0.74$) is of central importance to team structure, process, and effectiveness (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). It was assessed using six items from Van der Vegt and Janssen (2003). *Team positive affect* ($\alpha = 0.81$) was assessed because it plays an important role in determining within-group relationship quality (Walter & Bruch, 2008) and subsequent performance (Sy et al., 2005). Team positive affect was gauged using three pleasant low arousal items from the Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (Van Katwyk et al., 2000).[7] The three items were adapted by shifting the referent of each item to the team. *Team relationship conflict* ($\alpha = 0.79$) was measured using three items from Jehn and Mannix (2001) so as to be able to uniquely distinguish the effects of intrateam abusive behavior from this more commonly examined form of interpersonal conflict. *NVT size* was captured because larger teams may have access to more resources (e.g., funding, expertise) that increase slack and facilitate firm growth.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Variable Correlations

			r												
Variable	*Mean*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Firm age	2.03	0.63													
2. Firm size	0.00	1.98	.13												
3. Industry concentration	1.21	0.46	-.05	.12											
4. Team interdependence	4.26	0.55	.04	-.05	.07										
5. Team positive affect	3.71	0.79	.05	.02	-.03	.14									
6. Team relationship conflict	2.40	0.86	-.06	-.05	-.02	-.16*	-.39**								
7. Team size	4.80	2.76	-.14	.18*	.09	-.01	-.13	.10							
8. Intra-team abusive behavior	1.54	0.68	-.05	.04	.09	-.32**	-.37**	.55**	.12						
9. Perceived competitive intensity	2.69	0.87	-.01	.03	.19*	-.08	-.15*	.39**	.23**	.34**					
10. Team thriving	3.97	0.66	.09	.03	-.04	.35**	.51**	-.33**	-.07	-.44**	-.20**				
11. Team learning	4.09	0.69	.08	.05	-.06	.29**	.45**	-.25**	-.07	-.38**	-.20**	.93**			
12. Team vitality	3.85	0.73	.09	.01	-.02	.36**	.51**	-.37**	-.06	-.44**	-.16*	.94**	.73**		
13. Sales growth	2.04	0.27	.09	.03	.04	.063	-.13	.02	.07	.10	.08	.15*	.12	.17*	
14. Employment growth	2.04	0.20	.17*	.21**	.02	.06	-.10	.00	-.00	.08	.10	.14	.15*	.12	.78**

n = 179; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Firm-level covariates included firm age, revenue and employment totals for the year in which the survey data were collected (i.e., t_0), and industry concentration. These covariates were used to account for potential effects of firm age, size, and industry on performance (Keats & Hitt, 1988). Older firms are likely to have accumulated greater resources and larger firms are able to capitalize on advantages such as economies of scale. Data for firm age along with revenue and employment total were acquired from *Dun and Bradstreet*, while data on industry concentration were obtained from *IBIS World*. *Firm age* reflects the total number of years a firm has been in existence (i.e., from its founding date). Because of the strong correlation between firm revenue and employment totals ($r = 0.97$), we standardized and summed them to create a variable labeled *firm size* (Hmieleski & Sheppard, 2019). *Industry concentration* is identified by *IBIS World* on a 3-point scale ranging from low to high (1 = low: the top four companies account for less than 40% of industry revenue, 2 = medium: the top four companies account for 40% to 70% of industry revenue, 3 = high: the top four companies account for over 70% of industry revenue).

Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine our measurement model, which considered each of the three independent focal variables as distinct constructs (i.e., intrateam abusive behavior, NVT thriving, and perceived competitive intensity). NVT thriving was modeled as a second-order construct comprised of learning and vitality as first-order factors (Porath et al., 2012). The baseline measurement model (with freely varying latent constructs) demonstrated good fit to the observed data ($\chi^2 = 207.676$, $df = 99$, RMSEA = 0.078 and its 90% confidence interval of 0.063 to 0.093, CFI = 0.932, and SRMR = 0.060).[8] The average standardized factor loading is 0.76 (range = 0.51 to 0.89), the average CR is 0.87 (range = 0.77 to 0.92), and the average AVE is 0.64 (range = 0.41 to 0.84). In support of the divergent validity of these measures, the average MSV is 0.21 (range = 0.14 to 0.24), and in each case the AVE > MSV. These results provide a wide range of support for the convergent and discriminant validity of our focal independent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). Standardized factor loadings for the items comprising the focal constructs are shown in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Study hypotheses were tested by estimating two models. First, we examined an indirect effect model to test whether the relationship between NVTs' intrateam abusive behavior and new venture growth is mediated via team thriving (Hypotheses 1). In a second model, we integrated the proposed moderator (i.e., perceived competitive intensity) and tested the overall conditional indirect effects hypothesis (Hypothesis 2); that is, we fully considered the possibility of a statistically significant indirect effect being contingent on the degree of competitive intensity perceived to exist within the industry environment. We used SPSS 26.0 along with the PROCESS macro to test our hypotheses (Hayes, 2018). Confidence intervals (CIs) for the conditional indirect effect were computed using 20,000 bias corrected (BC) bootstrap samples.

Table 2
Regression Models of Team Thriving, Sales Growth, and Employment Growth

	Team thriving			*Sales growth*		*Employment growth*	
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Firm control variables							
Firm age	.05(.07)	.05(.07)	.06(.06)	.04(.03)	.04(.03)	.04(.02)†	.04(.02)†
Firm size	.01(.02)	.01(.02)	.01(.02)	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	.02(.01)**	.02(.01)**
Industry concentration	-.08(.09)	-.05(.09)	-.06(.09)	.01(.05)	.02(.04)	-.00(.03)	.00(.03)
Team control variables							
Team interdependence	.33(.08)**	.27(.08)**	.26(.08)**	.04(.04)	-.00(.04)	.03(.03)	.00(.03)
Team positive affect	.36(.05)**	.33(.06)**	.32(.06)**	-.05(.03)†	-.09(.03)**	-.03(.02)†	-.06(.02)**
Team relationship conflict	-.09(.05)†	-.02(.06)	.01(.06)	-.01(.03)	.00(.03)	-.00(.02)	.00(.02)
Team size	.00(.02)	.00(.02)	.01(.02)	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	-.00(.01)	-.00(.01)
Main effects							
Intra-team abusive behavior (AB)		-.20(.08)**	-.26(.08)**				
Perceived competitive intensity (PCI)			-.04(.05)				
Team thriving					.12(.04)**		.08(.03)**
Two-way interaction							
AB x PCI			.18(.07)**				
F-Ratio	13.65**	13.29**	11.73**	.92	2.18*	2.32*	2.97**
R^2	.36	.38	.41	.04	.09	.08	.12
ΔR^2		.02	.03		.05		.04

Unstandardized coefficients are shown and associated standard errors are listed in parentheses.
n = 179; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; † < .10

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among all study variables. Given that each of the potential controls correlated ($p < 0.05$) with one or more of the focal variables, we elected to report results that take the control variables into account. Following best practice recommendations (Bernerth et al., 2018), we repeated all hypothesis tests without the control variables. Results of this sensitivity test yielded an equivalent pattern of findings.

Tests of Indirect Effects

Hypothesis 1 predicted that NVTs' intrateam abusive behavior would have a negative indirect effect (via team thriving) on new venture growth. As shown in Table 2 (Model 2), intrateam abusive behavior was negatively associated with thriving (coefficient = −0.20, $p < 0.01$). Also, as expected, thriving was positively associated with sales growth (Model 5; coefficient = 0.12, $p < 0.01$) and employment growth (Model 7; coefficient = 0.08, $p < 0.01$). And finally, as shown in Table 3, intrateam abusive behavior was found to have a significant negative indirect effect on new venture growth, as the 95% bias corrected confidence interval did not cross zero for sales growth (boot indirect effect = −0.028, with a 95% BC CI = −0.081 to −0.006) or employment growth (boot indirect effect = −0.017, with a 95% BC CI = −0.058 to −0.003). Thus, *H1* is supported.

Tests of Conditional Indirect Effects

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the perceived competitive intensity present within the industry environment would moderate the relationship of intrateam abusive behavior with new venture growth via team thriving. Specifically, we anticipated that the indirect effect will become weaker (less negative) as competitive intensity increases. As shown in Table 2 (Model 3), the cross-product between intrateam abusive behavior and competitive intensity was

Table 3
Indirect Effects of Intrateam Abusive Behavior (via Team Thriving) on Sales Growth and Employment Growth

	Sales Growth			Employment Growth		
Model	Boot Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Boot 95% Confidence Interval	Boot Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Boot 95% Confidence Interval
Intrateam abusive behavior (via team thriving) on new venture growth	−0.028	0.018	−0.081 to −0.006	−0.017	0.013	−0.058 to −0.003

Note: $N = 179$. Bootstrap sample size = 20,000. Bias corrected confidence intervals are reported. Control variables = firm age, firm size, industry concentration, team interdependence, team positive affect, team relationship conflict, and team size.

Figure 2
Interaction Graph of Intrateam Abusive Behavior With Perceived Competitive Intensity on Team Thriving

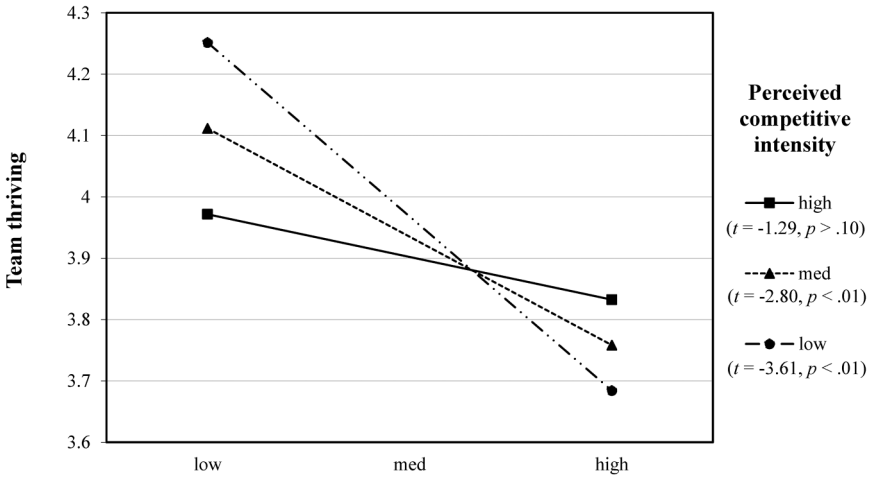


Table 4
Conditional Indirect Effects of Intrateam Abusive Behavior (via Team Thriving) on Sales Growth and Employment Growth at Different Levels of Competitive Intensity of the Industry Environment

		Sales Growth			Employment Growth		
Variable	Competitive Intensity	Boot Indirect Effect	Boot *SE*	Boot 95% Confidence Interval	Boot Indirect Effect	Boot *SE*	Boot 95% Confidence Interval
Intrateam abusive behavior	−0.867 (−1.0 *SD*)	−0.058	0.032	−0.156 to −0.015	−0.036	0.024	−0.111 to −0.007
	0.00 (*M*)	−0.036	0.021	−0.098 to −0.09	−0.022	0.016	−0.072 to −0.004
	0.867 (+1.0 *SD*)	−0.014	0.016	−0.060 to 0.06	−0.09	0.011	−0.046 to 0.002
		Index of Moderated Mediation	Boot *SE*	Boot 95% Confidence Interval	Index of Moderated Mediation	Boot *SE*	Boot 95% Confidence Interval
Formal statistical test of moderated mediation →		0.025	0.016	0.05 to 0.081	0.016	0.012	0.02 to 0.056

Note: $N = 179$. Bootstrap sample size = 20,000. Bias corrected confidence intervals are reported. Control variables = firm age, firm size, industry concentration, team interdependence, team positive affect, team relationship conflict, and team size.

Table 5
Regression Models of Team Learning, Team Vitality, Sales Growth, and Employment Growth

Variable	Team Learning Model 1	Team Vitality Model 2	Sales Growth Model 3	Sales Growth Model 4	Sales Growth Model 5	Employment Growth Model 6	Employment Growth Model 7	Employment Growth Model 8
Firm control variables								
Firm age	0.05 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)†	0.04 (02)†	0.04 (0.02)
Firm size	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.0 (0.01)	0.0 (0.01)	0.0 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)*	0.02 (0.01)**	0.02 (0.01)**
Industry concentration	−0.07 (0.10)	−0.06 (0.10)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.0 (0.03)	0.0 (0.03)	0.0 (0.03)
Team control variables								
Team interdependence	0.22 (0.09)*	0.30 (0.09)**	0.01 (0.04)	0.0 (0.04)	−0.0 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.0 (0.03)	0.0 (0.03)
Team positive affect	0.30 (0.06)**	0.33 (0.06)**	−0.09 (0.03)**	−0.08 (0.03)**	−0.09 (0.03)**	−0.05 (0.02)*	−0.06 (0.02)**	−0.06 (0.02)**
Team relationship conflict	0.06 (0.07)	−0.05 (0.07)	−0.0 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.0 (0.03)	−0.0 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Team size	0.0 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	−0.0 (0.01)	−0.0 (0.01)	−0.0 (0.01)
Main effects								
Intrateam abusive behavior (AB)	−0.24 (0.09)**	−0.27 (0.09)**						
Perceived competitive intensity (PCI)	−0.08 (0.06)	−0.0 (0.06)						

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

Variable	Team Learning Model 1	Team Vitality Model 2	Sales Growth Model 3	Sales Growth Model 4	Sales Growth Model 5	Employment Growth Model 6	Employment Growth Model 7	Employment Growth Model 8
Team learning			0.11 (0.03)**		0.09 (0.04)*	0.05 (0.03)*		0.01 (0.03)
Team vitality				0.09 (0.03)*	0.03 (0.04)		0.07 (0.03)**	0.07 (0.03)*
Two-way interaction								
AB × PCI	0.16 (0.08)*	0.20 (0.08)**						
F-Ratio	70.62**	110.76**	20.16*	10.68	10.98*	20.51*	30.09**	20.74**
R^2	0.31	0.41	0.09	0.07	0.10	0.11	0.13	0.13

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are shown and associated standard errors are listed in parentheses. $n = 179$.
*$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.01$. $^{\dagger}p < 0.00$.

significantly related to thriving (coefficient = 0.18, $p < 0.01$). Consistent with predictions, Figure 2 shows the slope of the relationship between intrateam abusive behavior and thriving is negative and significant for NVTs operating in industries perceived to be low (−1 *SD*) ($t = -3.61$, $p < 0.01$) and medium (*Mean*) ($t = -2.80$, $p < 0.01$) in competitive intensity, whereas the slope was less negative and nonsignificant for NVTs leading their firms in industries perceived to be high in competitive intensity ($t = -1.29$, $p > 0.10$).

Although these results support a pattern of moderated mediation in that (a) competitive intensity interacted with intrateam abusive behavior to influence team thriving and (b) team thriving was related to new venture growth, we examined bootstrapping results as a means to further verify our results (see Table 4). As shown, bias corrected confidence intervals indicate that the indirect effect of NVTs' intrateam abusive behavior on sales growth (boot indirect effect = −0.014, 95% BC CI = −0.060 to 0.006) and employment growth (boot indirect effect = −0.009, 95% BC CI = −0.046 to 0.002) were both nonsignificant at high levels (+1 *SD*) of perceived competitive intensity. In contrast, at low levels (−1 *SD*) of perceived competitive intensity, the indirect effect for sales growth (boot indirect effect = −0.058, 95% BC CI = −0.156 to −0.015) and employment growth (boot indirect effect = −0.036, 95% BC CI = −0.111 to −0.007) were significant; in fact, the estimates are nearly four times as large (and negative) as the indirect effects at high levels (+1 *SD*) of competitive intensity. Lastly, the formal statistical test of moderated mediation was significant for both sales growth (index of moderated mediation = 0.025, 95% BC CI = 0.005 to 0.081) and employment growth (index of moderated mediation = 0.016, 95% BC CI = 0.002 to 0.056). Taken together, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 2.

Post Hoc Analysis I: Evaluation of "Splitters" Versus "Lumpers" Approach to Team Thriving

As a *post hoc* empirical exercise, we retested our hypotheses using the individual facets of team thriving (i.e., learning and vitality). As one might expect, learning and vitality were highly correlated ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$). As such, we first explored learning and vitality effects separately (see Table 5, Models 3 and 4 and 6 and 7). With respect to the subfacet of learning, our supplementary findings mirrored those reported as part of formal hypotheses testing. We observed an indirect effect from intrateam abusive behavior to both firm growth outcomes through NVT learning, and this indirect effect was moderated by perceived competitive intensity (and the form of this interaction is consistent with Figure 2). A similar set of results were observed when considering the subfacet of vitality. That is, when we only consider thriving's vitality component, the results are again identical to those of our formal hypotheses testing.

At the request of a reviewer, we also examined a model in which the learning and vitality facets were entered as concurrent mediating pathways. In this test, the findings are not entirely consistent with those reported as part of our hypotheses testing. The results showed that learning is a more robust mediating variable when sales growth is the dependent variable and vitality is a better linking mechanism between intrateam abusive behavior and employment growth (see Table 5, Models 5 and 8). For these specific results, we caution readers from making strong inferences given the conceptual and empirical overlap between the two facets of thriving.

Post Hoc Analysis II: Key Informant Sensitivity Analysis

Key informant sampling techniques are common in management research (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2004; Datta et al., 2005), yet we recognize that CEO (i.e., primary respondents) responses might not fully reflect the views of the complete NVT. We, therefore, followed best practices by selecting primary respondents who possess the deepest knowledge regarding the dynamics of the NVTs (Krause et al., 2018). Nonetheless, it is possible that CEO respondents were influenced by perceptual biases.

To address this empirically, we used an imputation technique developed by Hirschfeld et al. (2013) to determine whether overly "positive" reporting by CEOs may have biased our findings. In brief, missing NVT member ratings from secondary informants were imputed into the existing dataset and quantitatively adjusted to account for potential perceptual bias on the part of the CEO respondents (see p. 460 of Hirschfeld et al., 2013 for a detailed description). Following Hirschfeld et al.'s (2013) approach, intrateam abusive behavior and team thriving were quantitatively adjusted to reflect a moderate level of positivity bias ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.30$) and an extreme level of positivity bias ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.60$). For intrateam abusive behavior, this required values for missing NVT members to be imputed into the dataset by using their CEO's rating as a baseline mean value for imputation and then adjusting each missing member's intrateam abuse mean score upward to account for the possibility that the CEOs ratings were positively biased (i.e., this is assuming the CEO's baseline intrateam abuse scores may have been too low). This procedure creates two intrateam abuse variables that represent all NVT members; one variable assumes a moderate level of positivity bias ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.30$) and the second variable assumes an extreme positivity bias ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.60$). For team thriving, we again imputed and quantitatively adjusted each missing member's team thriving score, but this time the members' imputed values were adjusted downward (i.e., this is assuming the CEO's baseline thriving scores may have been too positive). Once again, two variables were created to reflect moderate and extreme levels of perceptual bias. The two imputed datasets, which include ratings for all NVT members, were then aggregated to the NVT level of analysis.

Next, our study hypotheses were retested substituting in moderately and extremely adjusted data, respectively. With respect to *H1*, intrateam abusive behavior was found to have a negative and significant indirect relationship (via team thriving) with sales and employment growth using the moderately ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.30$) imputed and adjusted dataset as well as the extremely ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.60$) imputed and adjusted dataset. In regard to *H2*, at high levels (+1 *SD*) of perceived competitive intensity, the indirect effect of intrateam abusive behavior (via team thriving) was nonsignificant with sales and employment growth using both moderately ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.30$) and extremely ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.60$) imputed and adjusted datasets. In contrast, at low levels (−1 *SD*) of perceived competitive intensity, the indirect effect of intrateam abusive behavior (via team thriving) was significant with both sales and employment growth using the moderately ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.30$) and extremely ($d_{\text{miss}} = 0.60$) imputed and adjusted datasets. Finally, across both imputed and adjusted datasets, the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant. Collectively, these results mirror those reported using only CEO responses, providing additional evidence that the use of primary (i.e., CEO) respondent data for hypotheses testing does not appear to threaten the integrity of our overall model findings.

Discussion

The creation of a new firm is often described as an extreme event because of the pressure, distress, and frustration experienced by NVT members who work to overcome exceedingly high odds of failure (Baron, 1998; Headd, 2001). The fact that NVT members often have no previous managerial experience can intensify this already stressful situation (Camerer & Lovallo, 1999). As a result, such persons may occasionally allow their frustrations to spill over as hostility toward their business partners and colleagues (Freiberger & Swaine, 1999). Moreover, unlike within larger and more established firms, startups often have no individuals or procedures in place to reign in abusive NVT members (Beaver & Jennings, 2005). Consequently, abusive behavior among NVT members can significantly hinder the development and growth of new ventures. By investigating this issue, the results of the present study inform the literature on the dark side of entrepreneurship by clarifying the consequences associated with abusive behavior within NVTs—demonstrating *how* and *under what conditions* performance declines are likely to occur. In turn, through examination of its mediating role linking abusive behavior within NVTs to firm growth, the findings also advance the literature on workplace thriving by illustrating the important role it plays at the team level within the upper echelons of new ventures. Finally, the results advance the literature on industry competitive intensity by specifying how it can act as an external facilitating mechanism to bring together the top management of firms to overcome negative team dynamics that may otherwise hinder their performance.

Implications for Knowledge Regarding the Dark Side of Entrepreneurship and Thriving in NVTs

Research on the dark side of entrepreneurship has primarily focused on antisocial personality traits (e.g., narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellians) exhibited by individual entrepreneurs (Hmieleski, & Lerner, 2016; Kets de Vries, 1985; Klotz & Neubaum, 2016). Such a focus is logical when considering that throughout history—from J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie up to Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk—many of the world's most influential entrepreneurs have been documented as generating a toxic climate throughout all levels of their organizations (Isaacson, 2011; Morris, 2006; Stone, 2014; Vance, 2015). Whereas abuse is typically considered by most individuals to be morally unjust, popular culture appears to sometimes excuse or even celebrate such behavior when exhibited within the startup context (Handa, 2018). Considering that most startups are led by teams, rather than individual founders, the current research sought to move beyond the "great man" myth of entrepreneurship to examine the effects of abusive behavior within NVTs. In so doing, specific attention was given to why some NVTs, but not others, are able to perform relatively well despite the presence of abusive behavior among their members.

Our findings demonstrate that when abusive behavior is present and new ventures are operating in a competitive industry, the intense rivalry with competing firms will act to focus NVT members' attention on further developing their ventures and defeating the competition. In contrast, when NVTs operate in industries lacking such competitive pressures, any instances of internal acts of abuse will certainly be a salient focus of attention and, thus, have a negative impact. Hence, the findings of the current study clarify why new ventures led by notoriously

"abusive" individuals are sometimes able to not only survive the startup phase but also continue to develop and grow (e.g., Handa, 2018). Breugst and Shepherd's (2017) study offers indirect support for our findings. They found that perceived uncertainty of the industry environment, even when members were frustrated and anxious with one another, buffered the adverse effects of NVT relationship conflict on its members' negative affective reactions. Taken together, these works reaffirm the need for entrepreneurship research on NVT functioning and effectiveness to consider the role of conceptually grounded boundary conditions.

Even though the results of our study shed light on why some new ventures are able to grow, relatively speaking, despite experiencing abusive behavior within their leadership teams, it is important to clarify that under no condition was abusive behavior found to be a productive *source* of thriving. Thus, contrary to popular beliefs about abusive entrepreneurs getting the best out of one another and their subordinates (Isaacson, 2011; Stone, 2014), no such positive relationship was identified. Instead, as has generally been found in research on abusive behavior within established organizations (Tepper et al., 2017), the effects were found to range only from neutral to negative based on identified contextual contingencies. This is, however, an area where more robust research is needed to further address the abuse paradox.

Finally, the findings also speak to the potential for the concept of thriving to inform upper echelons' research in general and the study of NVTs in particular. For example, whereas prior research has linked individuals' thriving to innovation behavior (Wallace et al., 2016), our study empirically demonstrates that as NVTs' level of thriving increases, so does their firms' performance—in particular the sales and employment growth of new ventures. These findings align with the agentic and adaptive nature of thriving to spawn development and growth in general (Spreitzer et al., 2005), and we hope that other entrepreneurship researchers likewise consider blending this theoretical perspective with that of their own work.

Advancing the Socially Embedded Model of Thriving

A core tenet of Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving is that thriving can occur in the face of adverse circumstances such as the experience of workplace mistreatment. Specifically, threatening conditions are thought to prevent increased levels of thriving—but not to necessarily reduce current levels of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Based on this logic, Kleine et al. (2019) expected to observe a null relationship between adverse events and thriving in their meta-analysis on the topic. Instead, they found workplace mistreatment to be negatively associated with thriving. The findings of the current study provide additional nuance that may help to reconcile this perceived misalignment between theory and empirical evidence by demonstrating a contextual contingency (or boundary condition) through which such null effects might be observed. Specifically, our results reveal that intrateam abusive behavior (a form of workplace mistreatment) does not inhibit thriving when external threats to firm survival require teams to work together so as to prevent potential losses. In other words, external challenges buffer the negative relationship that internal threats may otherwise have on the ability of teams to thrive in their work.

The findings of the current research additionally advance knowledge by extending work in this area to the team level of analysis. Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) foundational work calls for research examining thriving's effects at higher levels of analysis, suggesting that thriving can manifest collectively in units. Moreover, Kleine et al. (2019) indicate the need for research

on thriving at higher levels of analysis, noting that few studies have examined the construct at the team or unit level. In response, the findings of the present research add new content to this literature by demonstrating thriving's role at a higher level of analysis (i.e., beyond individuals) through an upper echelons lens as it relates to the functioning and effectiveness of NVTs. In fact, the present research is the first to our knowledge to demonstrate a linkage of thriving among organizational leaders with objective measures of firm performance—thus further asserting the importance of the construct within the study of organizations.

The Counterintuitive Upside of Industry Competitive Intensity

The competitive intensity of industry environments has long been considered to be a significant hinderance to both the development of new ventures and the profitability of established firms (Dean & Sharfman, 1993). This is not surprising when considering that competitive intensity is marked by resource scarcity and limited strategic maneuverability, conferring little margin for error to firms operating under such conditions (Miller & Friesen, 1983). Research findings have primarily demonstrated that firms operating in environments that are high in competitive intensity tend to act rigidly and engage in low levels of entrepreneurial behavior (Kreiser et al., 2020). Indeed, empirical examinations have generally found competitive intensity to be associated with deleterious effects (Mitchell et al., 2011). In contrast, the findings of the current research offer a somewhat counterintuitive silver lining to this literature. Specifically, it appears that competitive intensity—as an external challenge—may present upside benefits in terms of strengthening the resolve for leadership teams to work through what might be otherwise unfavorable interpersonal dynamics in order to maintain or preserve the viability of their firms. Along these lines, it may prove fruitful for future research in entrepreneurship and strategic management to more broadly consider additional mechanisms through which the competitive intensity of industry environments may exert positive effects.

Practical Implications for NVTs, Startup Employees, and Entrepreneurial Resource Providers

The findings of the current research can also inform practical implications for NVTs, startup employees and job seekers, and entrepreneurial resource providers. Before moving into specific implications, it is important to first clarify that two of the main ways in which organizations of all types can increase performance are by either reducing unproductive behaviors or buffering their negative effects. In this vein, our practical implications involve the reduction and buffering of an unproductive behavior (i.e., intrateam abusive behavior). The most obvious implication of our findings for NVTs is to promote positive interactions and penalize abusive behavior when it occurs. These actions should take place as early on as possible, such as during the development of a startup's operating agreement between founders. The agreements (or charters) might include an interpersonal code of conduct stating clear guidelines for how cases of abusive behavior will be treated (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009).

Of particular relevance, Isaacson (2011) has observed that startup employees commonly tolerate an environment of abusive behavior in order to reap potential long-term rewards, including lucrative benefits in the form of stock options and/or large bonuses linked to firm growth. We note that the potential for realizing those benefits is likely to be lower in

industries that are competitively benign. This is because abusive behavior is more likely to produce deleterious effects within such environments that can hinder firm growth. In general, individuals pursuing employment with startups should seek information regarding the interactional dynamics of NVT members, so as to understand both how the culture of the organization is likely to evolve and—in turn—impact the long-term stability (or even viability) of the firm.

Lastly, entrepreneurial resource providers (e.g., venture capital firms, individual investors, suppliers, etc.) should seek information regarding the interpersonal dynamics of NVTs as part of their due diligence. After all, even startups with the most promising business ideas are unlikely to be successful if their NVTs are dysfunctional and unable to execute. Thus, failing to attune to interpersonal dynamics of NVTs may place resource providers at risk of either losing their investment or having to deal with defaulted payments for services rendered. Even though such risks may be reduced (or buffered) in industry environments that are high in competitive intensity, the landscape of industries shifts over time (becoming more or less competitive) and it would therefore likely be in the best interest of resource providers to avoid engaging in business with startups led by NVTs that routinely engage in intrateam abusive behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

As is the case with all research, the current study has limitations. To begin, the design of our study does not allow for causal inferences. Even though our lagged use of objective performance data is theoretically sound, it may be that some relationships are bidirectional. For example, low new venture growth resulting from a NVT experiencing intrateam abusive behavior could foster a vicious cycle that subsequently generates further abusive behavior. To this end, future research would likely benefit from adopting longitudinal research designs that consider feedback loops from firm growth to intrateam abusive behavior and team thriving.

Next, since several focal independent variables were measured in the same survey, concerns for common method variance must be overcome. Given the nature of our model, it is important to clarify that common method variance cannot produce artifactual interactions, although it can attenuate true interactions (Evans, 1985; Siemsen et al., 2010). For this reason, Podsakoff et al. (2012: 564-565) recommend that, when feasible, researchers should examine conditional effect models as a means to avoid issues relating to method bias—as has been done in the current research. Common method and same source effects were further minimized by the use of lagged, objective performance indicators.

Another limitation involves the representativeness of the primary informant (i.e., CEO) responses. Whereas our key informant approach mirrors prior research using similar samples (see, e.g., Ling et al., 2008), we acknowledge that it may be less than optimal insofar as the key informant responses are an estimate and rater biases can "creep" in. This is, however, unlikely to be a serious concern for several reasons. First, our primary (CEO) informants were well-positioned to possess accurate information regarding NVT functioning. Second, IRA scores among the primary and secondary respondents' ratings indicated that responses were interchangeable in terms of their absolute value (see Footnote 3). Third, the descriptive statistics for our perceptual measures are in line with published research. If

response-biases were present, we would expect to have observed less variability in CEOs' ratings. Fourth, if CEOs' ratings were indeed biased (e.g., self-enhancement due to socially desirable responding), this situation would represent a specific form of range restriction. Given that correlation coefficients are attenuated under conditions of restricted variance (LeBreton et al., 2003), our results would *underestimate* the magnitude of the observed conditional indirect effects. Finally, the results of our *post hoc* sensitivity analysis (Hirschfeld et al., 2013) empirically demonstrate that potential bias on the part of the primary informants did not unduly alter our findings.

As a final limitation, our arguments regarding the negative relationship between intrateam abusive behavior and team thriving were based on the hindering effects of interpersonal mistreatment described by Spreitzer et al. (2005) as being critical to the occurrence of thriving: task focus, exploration, and heedful relating. Even though we believe this logic to be sound, these mechanisms were not directly assessed in the current research. Likewise, we emphasized the notion of appraisals and attributions likely to be involved when developing our moderating hypothesis but did not assess them directly. Future research that expands our conceptual model to include such mechanisms in an attempt to further "flesh out" the nature of the relationships observed in the present study may therefore be a worthwhile contribution.

The current investigation also opens the door to other directions for research. Prior research findings suggest, for instance, that team commitment and behavioral integration may be relevant linking mechanisms (e.g., Foo et al., 2006; Simsek et al., 2005). By simultaneously investigating multiple mediators (in addition to NVT thriving), researchers could provide a more nuanced picture of NVT dynamics that are likely affected by abusive behavior. Next, our study did not consider the intentions of exhibited abusive behavior. Recently, it has been suggested (Marchiondo et al., 2018) that interpersonal mistreatment can produce positive outcomes when appraised by targets as a challenge (i.e., an opportunity for growth) as opposed to a hindrance (i.e., a threat that is out of their control). It seems possible that intrateam abusive behavior may produce positive outcomes in the short term, especially if the mistreatment is intended to mobilize and energize, rather than diminish, the efforts of team members. We suspect, however, that such benefits would not be enduring over time. Thus, it would be important for future research addressing this issue to consider the temporal context through which abusive behavior plays out within the development of new ventures.

Conclusion

Our results highlight the important consequences of abusive behavior within NVTs. As Hambrick (1995) noted, deficiencies within top management teams—such as an abusive executive—prevents them from dealing with other important business issues. Thus, a key message emerging from our findings is that, despite being a low base-rate phenomenon, the occurrence of abusive behaviors among NVT members limits the ability of startups to develop and grow. Such limitations appear, however, to be less of a hindrance for firms operating in highly competitive industry environments. To this end, leaders of new ventures (especially those experiencing abusive behavior within their NVTs) are likely to benefit in the short term by focusing their energies and those of their NVT members on challenges in their external environment. Once the new venture reaches a point of competitive stability, issues of

abusive behavior within the NVT are likely to be more easily addressed without adversely impacting the firm's performance—and so doing will be crucial before a dysfunctional culture becomes embedded into the organization, thus limiting the long-term viability of the firm.

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Appendix A
Measurement Items and Standardized Factor Loadings for Confirmatory Factor Analysis

		Standardized Factor Loading	
Constructs	Items	First-Order	Second-Order
Intrateam	Team members ridicule each other	0.77	
abusive behavior	Team members tell each other that their thoughts are stupid	0.86	
(Tepper, 2000)	Team members put each other down in front of others	0.87	
	Team members make negative comments about each other	0.79	
CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.66	Team members tell each other that they are incompetent	0.77	
Team thriving	*Learning* (CR = 0.86, AVE = 0.67)		0.85
(Porath et al., 2012)	Team members find themselves learning often	0.75	
	Team members are continually improving in their jobs	0.88	
CR = 0.92, AVE = 0.84	Team members continue to learn more and more as time goes by	0.83	
	Vitality (CR = 0.88, AVE = 0.71)		0.98
	Team members look forward to each new day	0.80	
	Team members have energy and spirit	0.84	
	Team members are alive and vital	0.89	
Perceived competitive intensity	The industry environment causes a great deal of threat to the survival of our firm	0.81	
(Miller & Friesen, 1982)	Price competition within our industry is a substantial threat to our firm	0.77	
	Competition in product novelty is a major threat to our firm	0.53	
	Competition in quality is a significant threat to our firm	0.51	
CR = 0.77, AVE = 0.41	Dwindling markets for our products/services is a major problem for our firm	0.53	

Note. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

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Notes

1. Spreitzer et al. (2012) and Kleine et al. (2019) specify "incivility" as a negative relational antecedent of thriving within the scope of Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work. Since the theoretical logic and reasoning behind the relationship of incivility with vitality and learning (i.e., thriving) holds for a wide range of workplace aggression constructs, we follow Hershcovis (2011) by instead using the term "mistreatment" as a general catchall for interpersonal displays of aggression. We believe this to be an appropriate substitute for the narrower concept of incivility within Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work since a mistreatment label more broadly captures the spirit of the arguments made regarding negative relational antecedents.
2. The literature on work group aggression has described a similar phenomenon termed "contagious aggression," wherein a teammate's aggressive actions ricochet throughout a team (Glomb & Liao, 2003).
3. IRA reflects the absolute consensus in scores provided by a set of respondents. In regard to intrateam abusive behavior, thriving, and perceived competitive intensity, we computed IRA estimates using primary and secondary informant data (as an indicator of CEO agreement with team members) as well as only using secondary informant data (as an indicator of agreement among team members, excluding the CEO). Given that respondents were guaranteed anonymity and told their responses were exclusively for research purposes, it seems likely that the respondents provided unbiased ratings. As such, we first used a uniform distribution to calculate IRA ($\sigma^2_E = 2.0$). Results demonstrated strong agreement, with median $r_{wg(j)}$ estimates ranging from 0.91 to 0.96 using primary and secondary informant data and 0.78 to 0.98 using only data from secondary informants. Next, to account for the possibility that respondents' ratings were somehow affected by cognitive or affective biases, we computed IRA estimates using a slightly skewed distribution ($\sigma^2_E = 1.34$) and a more extremely skewed ($\sigma^2_E = 0.90$) distribution. IRA estimates continued to suggest strong agreement. Median estimates of $r_{wg(j)}$ based on slightly skewed and more extremely skewed distributions for intrateam abusive behavior were 0.94 and 0.89 using all available team data and 0.95 and 0.89 using only secondary informant data, for thriving were 0.90 and 0.86 using all available team data and 0.87 and 0.80 using only secondary informant data, and for perceived competitive intensity were 0.87 and 0.80 using all available team data and 0.73 and 0.59 using only secondary informant data. Finally, we also tested mean differences for the three focal independent variables between the primary and secondary informant data. In each case, mean differences were nonsignificant ($p > 0.10$), thus further demonstrating high agreement.
4. As previously noted, we received multiple informant responses for about 20% ($n = 35$) of the sampled firms. Although it would have been ideal to obtain secondary responses from all firms, our response rate for secondary informants is in line with the 25% response rate reported by Datta et al. (2005). Thus, following the approach taken by Datta et al., we used the primary informants' responses (i.e., those of the CEOs) to represent the firms; the secondary responses were used solely for assessment of rater agreement. Nevertheless, we also ran our conditional indirect effects model on an "aggregated" sample to examine the extent to which the use of primary versus secondary responses altered our findings. The results did not change when using the aggregated data (i.e., the CEOs' responses + secondary team members' responses).
5. We focused on active, rather than passive, abusive behaviors among NVTs due to its likelihood of having the most negative effects on team thriving.
6. All analyses were additionally run with these three cases removed. Results were not substantively different from those presented and are available upon request from the first author.
7. Low activation items (e.g., members of the team feel: at ease, satisfied, relaxed), as opposed to high activation items (e.g., members of the team feel: energetic, enthusiastic, inspired) were used to measure positive team affect in order to avoid conceptual overlap with the vitality dimension of team thriving.
8. The measurement model was also examined with thriving entered as a unidimensional construct. There was no statistical difference between the models, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 1.34$, $p = 0.25$, and the reported fit indices were nearly identical.

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