

Do you agree that competition, not collaboration, is more important for society to progress?

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In August 2017, news broke that the ride-sharing company Uber was in talks with Singapore's primary taxi company, Comfort, in a bid to collaborate and consolidate both companies. After several years of intense competition between Uber and pre-existing taxi services worldwide, this may be the first time the ride-sharing company joins forces with another local firm which could possibly make up for the millions of dollars lost due to competition. This aptly brings up the discussion of the varying impacts of competition and collaboration on the progress of society and success of businesses. Collaboration can enable organisations and individuals to reap the benefits each party can offer, leading to faster and more inclusive progress as a society. On the other hand, competition sharpens the capabilities of firms and governments, leading to better innovations for the good of society. Hence, it is my stand that competition is not any more important than collaboration. In fact, the right mix of both will lead to accelerated improvement in society.

Some may argue that competition is more significant as a contributing factor to societal progress as it brings about innovation and pushes firms out of complacency. With formidable opponents entering markets once dominated by only a few players, these incumbent firms will indubitably be driven to keep their market share. In order to do so, firms must keep up with the changes in technology especially when new firms are much more technologically savvy and hence, have a lower operating cost than incumbent firms. For example, Amazon's Prime Now, which is a grocery-only delivery service that promises to deliver consumer's orders within 2 hours, has sprung up in many cities all over the world. Many supermarkets are now forced to innovate through adopting technology that will lower their production costs and are forced to join the mobile economy. Competition for countries to fully accept e-payment is strife. With countries like India and China already on their way to adopting a fully digital currency, countries like Singapore, who is surprisingly lagging behind, are kept on their toes and are relentlessly looking for new solutions to their problem. This shows that international competition can indeed drive innovation and progress in countries because of the desire to remain competitive and not be left behind by the onset of disruptive technology. As such, innovation is a more compelling force for progress because collaboration on the other hand, might not have led to such a sharp incline of firms entering the markets and quick action of many organisations in developing new technology.

Despite this assertion, competition may actually hinder society's progress as competing parties are not willing to see the grander view of their potential contributions to the nation. In a bid to push for their own profit-motivated agendas in a competitive environment, organisations might end up causing more damage than progress to society. The slow adoption of a unified payment in Singapore is one such example. Because of the various banks' insistence on pushing out their own e-payment apps and devices, one can see many different payment terminals in shops around Singapore. This competition, rivalry and the lack of collaboration between banks and institutions has led to lack of progress in the e-payment sector. Singapore is falling behind when compared to Hong Kong which has a universal "octopus card" and China which adopts e-payment through QR codes used anywhere. On the other hand, should more collaboration take place, such as the potential collaboration between gaming company Razer and government institutions to push for unified e-payment in 18 months, society would have progressed much faster and Singapore could be on its way to become a leading nation in technology adoption. Hence collaboration is more significant since competition and the accompanying profit motive of firms will be a hindrance to development.

Furthermore, a collaborative spirit can enable the various parties to reap the benefits that each party can offer, accelerating progress of society and collectively reaching greater heights. When individuals

or firms collaborate, the various perspectives and ideas that each party can offer will be pooled together. This gives new insights and interesting perspectives on an issue, strengthening the idea. This can be seen in workplaces around the world where a strong culture of collaboration instead of competition is encouraged. The workplaces of many western companies have sought to remove the physical barriers of “cubicles” in a bid to promote collaboration. Tech conglomerates like Google and Microsoft who have adopted such policies are clearly very successful. This leads to the progress of the company and individuals. Recently in China, close to a dozen firms including Alibaba, Baidu, China Insurance Life and Tencent among others, have come together to invest in a government telecommunication company. These companies have pooled massive amounts of resources and data that can potentially have a far-reaching impact on the lives of citizens. The new telco promises to better cater to its consumers given the massive amount of data made available through collaboration. Hence, it is evident that when organisations (especially those of differing specialities) come together instead of competing, huge achievements can be made possible.

In addition, the progress of society in its cultural, social and environmental aspect is in fact, better achieved through collaboration than competition. Organisations often come together to work for a common cause such as environmental protection and education. For instance, Conservation International, a non-profit organisation, often partners global businesses like Starbucks and Walmart to help their business achieve more sustainable means of production. Often, art institutions also partner with schools to promote a common goal of nurturing a culturally educated generation, appreciative of the arts. Individuals such as Leonardo Dicaprio also partner international organisations to push for more action to ameliorate environmental problems. Clearly, such efforts require collaboration instead of competition for the common good of society.

Contrary to the above circumstances where either collaboration or cooperation is more important, it is often the case where competition triggers collaboration and in that sense, both play an equally important role for a society’s progress. A good example will be the collaboration of Baidu with various Chinese e-commerce firm to compete with Alibaba and the buying over of Yahoo! China by Alibaba to compete with search engine Baidu. These collaborations were fostered because of intense competition. Such phenomena is commonplace and often create greater consumer choice, lower prices and economic growth for the country, hence leading to societal progress.

In conclusion, a good mix of both is necessary for progress and development. While competition is necessary to avoid complacency and encourage innovation, progress will be hindered if companies and individuals do not work together to compete against external influences and market power. Hence, it is not the case that either competition or collaboration trumps the other but a matter of taking both into consideration for the betterment of society.

Comments:

A very interesting and insightful essay. Your arguments are clear and well thought-out. A good array of examples too, which are often well-explained, though some are slightly hypothetical. Just be careful to keep your language clear. The essay also occasionally reads like an Economics essay, so do be careful to refrain from using economic jargon.