**Collaboration Will Take Us Where Competition Can't**

All across the world, at any moment, on any day, billions of people are going about their lives looking out for each other. If you pay attention, you will even see people helping others without expecting that help to be reciprocated. Cooperation and thoughtfulness abound, while selfish, antagonistic acts pale in numbers.

At the heart of OnTrackNorthAmerica’s work is the advancement of collaboration and coordination as a far superior basis for guiding business and government than competition.

Yet, “Are people inherently compassionate or self-centered?” has remained an oft-posed question. I believe this wearying confusion has been perpetuated by the difference in impact between acts of cooperation or love and acts of aggression or thoughtlessness.

Hug someone today, and the feeling of love can fade by tomorrow. You almost have to hug them over and over again, and we do. Shoot or knife someone, on the other hand, drive drunk and crash, or meanly criticize, and the memory and consequence can last a lifetime. It is this severe and often lasting impact of violence and negativity that muddles our appreciation for the overwhelming amount of cooperation and consideration all around us.

But before establishing my own confidence in man’s ability to collaborate and work in the community’s best interests, I had to ponder, as many of us do, “What is man’s true nature?”

Particularly in America, we have been taught that striving for individual success is best for everyone because the authority, Charles Darwin, said that evolution depended on it. “Survival of the Fittest,” implying that humans are selfish by nature and that selfishness drives the advancement of the species, continues to exert a strong and debilitating influence on our society.

It occurred to me to read *On the Origin of Species* to see what Darwin actually said, not what I have been told he said. What I found was that Charles Darwin didn’t invent the phrase “Survival of the Fittest.” Contrary to prevailing belief, he wasn’t highlighting individual competition. Instead, he wrote that species, ecosystems, communities, and individuals organize themselves around the long-term interests of the community and future generations. In nature, the community provides the best perches, the best food, and the best resources to those amongst them that are strongest and, therefore, produce the healthiest offspring. He was inspired by the sacrifice and commitment of individual members to place their communities’ best interests before their own. Harmony with the community, not domination of the community, is what he observed. Charles Darwin said that individuals in nature are inherently social and communal, and that is what provides sustainability.

So, how did we come to misapply Darwin’s transformative work? Why did we orient the modern world’s commerce and governance around competition and mistrust rather than cooperation and trust? What would have us think that we must put individuals, companies, organizations, political parties, and countries in an endless competition?

We remember this was the mid-19th century when American and British industrialists desperately wanted a belief system to justify their massive accumulation of control and capital. They sponsored members of a new intellectual field called Social Philosophy to promote a misreading of *On the Origin of Species* to give their domination cover. One of the movement’s leading figures was Herbert Spencer, the originator of “Survival of the Fittest.” The public’s access to the book was rare, allowing those in power to influence public perception with biased speeches and articles under the guise of “science.”

Governance and commerce have since developed around an over-reliance on competitive debate, competing factions, and constant jockeying for attention and favors. Competition stifles our collective ability. Of course, competition can be beneficial. However, orienting our civilization around competition is outdated and unsustainable.

We are fortunate that coordinating across industries, companies, agencies, political parties, and jurisdictions requires respect, collaboration, and system-level decision-making. They are the ways of being and practices we want in our world. It is highly inefficient for towns, counties, states, and countries to compete with each other. The wise placement of all the components for a sustainable industrial system is only possible through collaboration and coordination.

As we face environmental stresses and extreme violence that threaten our peace and prosperity, it is more important than ever to release those outdated and limiting assumptions and embrace the reality of man’s inherent commitment to the community. Let’s redesign our industrial systems for sustainability and our governance systems for workability.

OnTrackNorthAmerica convenes stakeholders in productive dialogue using our question-based inquiry method, IntelliSynthesis. Questions are inherently interactive, opening our minds to intelligent thought exploration and shared knowledge. Tracking and utilizing this collective intelligence allow diverse stakeholders to design and implement action plans.

Our work is informed by close interactions with over 11,000 individuals across the continent who have overwhelmingly expressed their heartfelt desire for a world that works for all. As Darwin discovered over 175 years ago, society advances when people balance useful competition with essential cooperation.