

Positive collaboration: Factors and mechanisms of evolution[☆]

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Abstract

This article proposes that two types of collaboration can be distinguished: a positive collaboration (not directed against third parties) and negative collaboration. I consider the hypothesis that in the process of social development, the transaction costs ratio of the three main types of coordination—competition, power, and collaboration—is changing in favor of the latter. The article examines the mechanisms that are responsible for the implementation of this tendency and attempts to explain its nonmonotonicity. It is shown that the strengthening role of positive collaboration is largely explained by cultural changes, including the enhancement of tolerance culture, spread of cosmopolitanism and altruism, and increase in the planning horizon as well as trust radius. I demonstrate the importance of the institutions that support positive collaboration in the process of catching-up development; it is shown that shock reforms could lead to the formation of negative collaboration mechanisms. A program of interdisciplinary research is outlined for the further development of these ideas.

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1. Introduction

A recent paper (Polterovich, 2015) contains arguments which demonstrated that, in the process of evolution, the scope of the coercion mechanisms embed-

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ded in the institutions of competition and power is reduced due to the expansion of the scope and significance of the institutions of collaboration. This means that the assumptions about the selfishness of man and competition as the main driving force of progress, which underlie the economic mainstream and many political constructs, lead to distorted perceptions about the most important trends in socioeconomic development. At the same time, the initial anarchistic idea about the supremacy of cooperative institutions over competition and power mechanisms, which used to seem purely normative and, moreover, utopian, is gaining empirical grounds. By encouraging the development of such institutions, we are only accelerating the “natural course of things,” rather than breaking it.

This view on the evolution of society and the task of its improvement form the basis of the philosophy of collaboration (collaborativism), which is suggested in the cited paper. In the present article, we specify and elaborate on its concepts in several directions. First of all, we introduce the terms of positive (not aimed against third parties) and negative collaboration. The argument about expanding collaboration is of course related to its positive version. In the work that is cited, this fact was only slightly noted; however, it deserves more detailed consideration. In comparing transaction costs for the three main mechanisms of coordination, i.e., competition, power, and collaboration, we discuss in detail the moral and psychological costs of competition and consider the prerequisites for reducing relative costs of collaboration.

The norms of civic culture were initially shaped within the elites and embedded in the mass consciousness through religious dogmas and coercion on the part of the state. For example, the “thou shalt not steal” commandment was supported by a cruel punishment—by amputation of the thief’s hand. However, during the course of evolution, the role of coercion was simultaneously reduced through two processes: changing laws and the internalization of norms. The former process was reviewed in detail by Polterovich (2015), based on examples of evolution in bankruptcy and antitrust law. The second process is described in Section 6 of this article.¹

It should be specially mentioned that the trend towards expanding the scope of positive collaboration was only fully manifested in the 20th century in developed countries. However, this process was not monotonic. The question about the nature of nonmonotonicity appears to be important. Below, we attempt to advance its understanding, relying on differences between the concepts of cooperative efficacy (see Cowen and Sutter, 1999) and collaborativeness: the former characterizes an individual’s ability to coordinate efforts with other agents; the latter means not only skills but the pursuit of collaboration. In addition, we study the role of the institutions of positive collaboration in the processes of catching-up development, and we identify one of the causes for nonmonotonicity: the shock nature of the institutional transformations that are inherent in revolutions and “radical” reforms. Examples demonstrate that, in this case, the mechanisms of negative collaboration² occur naturally, and they must either be destroyed or re-built in the process of further development.

¹ The mutual influence of institutions and culture is discussed by Polterovich (2016a), with references to the related literature.

² This part of the analysis is a continuation of the aforementioned paper.

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