

COMMENT: Synergos, a Possible Solution to a Seemingly Insurmountable

Problem?

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I spent my Fall 2019 semester interning with a company called Synergos, which is based in the San Francisco Bay Area. This experience was an ever-changing rollercoaster of new developments and improvements centered on the idea that a company can make a positive (and hopefully at some point, global) difference on climate change. The company itself has changed and grown into something much greater than when I originally joined in July 2019 and officially started my internship in September. When I began, the company was only an alliance looking to build headway toward the goal of converting Mediterranean islands to renewable energy use by having developers join a process improvement system, with government buy-in, to accelerate the process of clean energy development. The plan was to use entertainment and celebrities as ways to draw attention to clean energy and further entice developers and governments to join.

Now, Synergos has changed into something much more comprehensive – which I believe is a more workable solution. Synergos is now working to accelerate the clean energy process in entire countries through technology that includes process improvements by alleviating bottlenecks and standardizing certain processes and contracts within the clean energy development process. It also utilizes a virtual map of the best places for clean energy projects, as well as a rating system for projects and a tracking system for governments to track their climate goals. The tracking of climate goals has also

become a part of a larger Synergos strategy to help play a part in establishing Smart Countries (not just Smart Cities) that are more efficient, better for the environment, and offer several tools for boosting human rights situations within the country – including healthcare, quality of life, digital inclusion, and more.

If all goes well, Synergos will be incredibly beneficial for helping countries meet and accelerate their climate goals, but you might wonder: How in particular does Synergos' work relate to human rights? To answer this question, it is vital to understand that climate change and its effects impact every part of humanity's future. If climate change sets in as the predictions say it will, its effects will be detrimental to the Earth and its population – from droughts and flooding causing crop failure and famine to natural disasters like the world has never seen before. Even now, hotter temperatures, erratic weather patterns, and longer droughts are leading to dire consequences. This will have an all-encompassing effect on the entirety of the world's population, and government inaction to prevent these natural disasters directly relates to human rights frameworks such as the United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 3, for instance, outlines the "right to life, liberty, and security of person," which would be threatened by climate change if not immediately addressed by the international community. In places like the Pacific Islands, Article 15 – the right to a nationality – will be violated as the islands go under water and many have to search for a new place to live as climate refugees. This will also be the case in countries where the land becomes uninhabitable due to draught and flooding and people are forced to leave their homes, and possibly even their countries, due to climate change. Article 25 further provides the right to, "a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family," which would be at risk due to crop failure, migration, and destruction stemming from climate change.

It is notable that climate change most intensely affects the world's most vulnerable, including the global poor who lack the resources to adapt to the effects – even though the global poor generally contributes very little to climate change, particularly if they engage in low-carbon, small agriculture-based economies. One could argue that the most vulnerable populations paying the highest cost for the actions of industrial Western economies violates Article I of the UDHR: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

In an attempt to prevent such human rights risks, Synergos was founded as a public benefit corporation that is enacting policy changes and clean energy development acceleration. They aim to help mitigate climate change and encourage much-needed changes within the state system to find a way forward in the next ten years – before it is too late to offset the even more drastic effects of climate change to come. That is the center of their mission, and the company is working with many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to bring about the policy changes needed to fast-track clean energy production and help mitigate climate change on a country-level scale.

Within my internship, at the company's beginning stages, I was right in the thick of it – attending major meetings, discussing concepts to help build the organization, and watching as the future of the company was shaped. Going into the internship, I expected to play a smaller role mostly involving research and helping establish the internship program for the future. And though I did do this, I ended up doing so much more and being more involved than I could have imagined. As mentioned, Synergos had a much smaller scale at the beginning in Fall 2019 than it does now, once only focusing specifically on the Mediterranean. Over time, I had the opportunity to watch its focus change and grow into a country-level plan, and then to a European Union-wide plan that several European organizations are interested in. I also did not expect that the “tech element” would be so significant – setting up a whole clean energy project acceleration application, a map and rating system for optimal placement of clean

energy projects using virtual reality, and finally giving countries the ability to track and publish their climate goal progress and adjust policy based on this tracking.

As the company changed and its goals grew, my role in the company also grew from simply being an intern to eventually becoming the Interim Chief of Staff for Synergos and helping to create and improve the project plan. I also created relationships with our government, foundation, tech, and non-profit partners. I could never have imagined all of the skills I would learn from the variety of tasks placed before me, including project management, business development, political outreach and strategy, fundraising, financial modeling, website development, writing legal contracts, and so much more. In addition, I also learned more about how partnerships between different organizations, companies, and public-private partnerships are formed and how they work.

Knowing what it takes to start a company and knowing how these partnerships work will be crucial to my future, particularly since I would like to start an NGO related to refugee resettlement. Though this internship was in another industry than the one I would eventually like to go into, I learned many skills and gained a great deal of knowledge that will be paramount to eventually starting my NGO. And with the threat of climate change creating forced displacement, these issues are undoubtedly interrelated. Knowing that I was a part of something that could actually make a big difference in climate mitigation makes me feel as if I have at least done something besides individual lifestyle changes to face the seemingly insurmountable problem of climate change.

One of the biggest negative surprises of my internship was the lack of a sense of urgency when talking with people about climate change. People in the field had that sense of urgency to an extent and would be very excited when they heard about Synergos' work, but many would offer to help and then find excuses not to. There were many that did help, but more than I would have imagined simply didn't. When I would talk with the everyday person, they would acknowledge climate change was coming and it was bad, but then would largely reject ideas when I tried to give them suggestions about individual,

small things they could do to make a difference. Also, the people I got to know who were alleged “leaders” in the Silicon Valley in green tech and fighting climate change often lived lifestyles that were not exactly the most climate friendly, which to me seemed hypocritical. If someone is worried about climate change and wants to make a solid difference, I assumed they would show that both in their careers and their personal lives. Overall, the lack of real urgency and the hypocrisy in the industry were quite surprising and angered me. If we want to live in a livable world in the future, we have to take meaningful and real action now.

To make people more involved and more willing to actually change their lives, I think that advocates must show them the gravity of the situation through imagery, well-sourced articles with accurate facts, and a clear message. Practicing what one preaches as far as climate mitigation goes – and then showing people that it is a lot easier than they think – can also help. I’ve learned in conversation that it is important not to attack the actions of the other person, but rather place the issue and its consequences up front and suggest changes in a subtle way that does not push the other person too hard. If one pushes too hard, others will reject what you are saying right away; if it is done in a more casual way, with suggestions rather than commands, people might be more open to actually making changes. Voting and advocating for government officials who support climate mitigation policies is also necessary. Individuals can only do so much without a large change in policies and regulations, and having politicians who deny that climate change exists – and who also do not place climate mitigation policy highly on their agenda (including many U.S. politicians from both parties) – does not benefit our future. It puts us at a large risk of sticking our heads in the sand until it is too late and the drastic consequences of climate change cannot be mitigated. I learned a great deal from this internship and I have a renewed hope that we can do something before it is too late. I believe that people can come together on the principle that we do not want any human being to live in the horrible world that will come if climate change is not addressed.

References

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