

Welcome to the Ernst Strüngmann Forum podcasts—a series of discussions designed to explore how people collaborate under real-life settings. Joining us in the series are high-profile experts from diverse areas in society, whose experiences will lend insight to what collaboration is, what it requires, and why it might break down. This series is produced in collaboration with the Convergent Science Network.

P. Verschure This is Paul Verschure and today I am speaking with Meg Jones. Before we dive into the issue of collaboration, could you give us a summary of the trajectory that brought you to where you are today in science and other activities?

M. Jones Collaboration has basically been the backbone of my professional career. In high school I was very interested in how the Japanese had managed to rebuild themselves from the rubble of World War Two into the economic superpower it was in the 1980s. That was my first dive into collaboration. Going to Japan as an exchange student and understanding the Japanese way of thinking from the inside out. After that, I worked for Medecins Sans Frontières, Doctors Without Borders, and also the United Nations for 15 years. I'm currently with Fairtrade International in their Australia/New Zealand office, which is, of course, also about collaboration. The whole piece has been around looking at how you can bring people together to take projects to scale or to replicate, but it really is about the scale aspect.

P. Verschure Drawing on your experiences early on in Japan and then ending up where you are now in an NGO, how would you define collaboration? What is collaboration, and what are the underlying features?

M. Jones There is an African proverb that says: "Alone I can go fast, and together we go far." It's that recognition. Collaboration is bringing a group of people or entities together to achieve something, whether that's a task or a goal. It's bringing more than one person or entity together to achieve a common task or goal. What that really requires is a vision. The people who are going to be part of this collaboration need to recognize a common vision. They need to see what they can contribute to it, and what they're going to get out of it. They need to agree on leadership as well. I think this is how in some ways it differs from cooperation. You can cooperate without necessarily having a strong leadership component in place, but collaboration needs to have leadership.

P. Verschure You highlight goals, objectives as incentives, but also leadership. Do you see other underlying features that stand out? Or are these for you the three pillars of human collaboration?

M. Jones Human collaboration is around goals; it is around incentives and leadership. But the make or break in the mix is trust. If there's trust between partners, then you'll be able to continue even when things do become difficult, but without trust, nothing will be achieved, and the thing will fall apart. I have worked for the United Nations for 15 years, and I think the United Nations is the platform for collaboration par excellence. It was established for that out of the rubble of World War Two. The purpose was to bring the nations of the world together to ensure that the atrocities that had taken place preceding and during the war would never happen again. It is the forum where, at a governmental level, the governments of the world have agreed to not in any way give up their sovereignty. They retain their sovereign rights. It is a forum for collaboration for the greater good, whether that's human rights—I worked at the office of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights—or if it's in trade. I worked in trade for many years. Or as is central to our response to the COVID pandemic, the World Health Organization. Governments coming together to share the results of their scientific research and their experience in innovation in tackling the virus at the national level.

P. Verschure If the United Nations aspires to be the example of collaboration, what would be the objective? What is the goal of getting antagonized countries to communicate? Or is it also to achieve a common objective in a more constructive sense?

- M. Jones      The overarching goal of the United Nations is peace and security. That's central to the UN. What we've seen with globalization and other factors is that peace and security can be impacted by factors even beyond the general factors. For example, ill health like we're experiencing now with the pandemic, or the race toward the conservation of water resources, the ownership of water resources. There are many circumstances in which the United Nations acts as the convening force for discussions around which collaborations can form and prove useful.
- P. Verschure      Has it achieved that goal? Is it effective in achieving this goal?
- M. Jones      I think, yes. I can only speak to my own experience in forming collaborations as an international civil servant, as part of the UN machinery. I can share some experience on that. But before I do that, I think it's worth mentioning the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], which were promulgated under Kofi Annan's leadership, and the Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs ran from 2000 to 2015; the Sustainable Development Goals will run from 2015 to 2030). This is where the member states of the United Nations have agreed on the development agenda. The purpose is to focus and concentrate resources around the 17 goals, which include, of course, health and human rights and climate change. If I can go back to answer your specific question about where the UN has been successful, one small example is the program for Women's Economic Empowerment at the International Trade Center, which I headed up, and is part of the UN in Geneva. It's where the World Trade Organization [WTO] makes the trade rules, where WTO member states establish the rules that govern international trade. The International Trade Center is all about putting those rules into practice and working with the private sector. The UN is the public sector working with the private sector to help small and medium-sized companies export. Within that context, I was responsible for women's economic empowerment, currently sustainable development goal number five. We put together a collaboration for that goal, because the thing about the UN is that it is vast, and it is under resourced, whether you're talking about human or financial resources. That's why it needs to leverage its collaborating, its convening power to form collaborations between the private and public sector, academics, and NGOs to achieve those goals. That's what we did with women's economic empowerment when we established what was then called the Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors, which is now called She Trades.
- P. Verschure      For the United Nations, there are two different collaborative processes that we could analyze. On the one hand, it is a body where countries try to collaborate. On the other hand, it's a body formed by humans who internally also have to collaborate to serve, in some sense, the collaboration between nations. If we take your pillars of collaboration of goals, incentives, and leadership, how would that translate to these two different processes? Because you're also faced with a massive heterogeneity in terms of the players at both of these levels.
- M. Jones      That's where I think collaboration differs from cooperation. Cooperation you get between homogenous entities. When you talk about collaboration, it is heavy lifting because there is a lot more heterogeneity amongst the players. I think you're right, the UN is probably one of the most diverse institutions on the face of the planet. By definition it has 193 sovereign states as members coming together to try to agree on goals, which is why if there are any outcomes such as sustainable development goals, I mean, what could you do on sustainable development? There are thousands of things you could do on that front. For the member states of the United Nations to come together to narrow that down to just 17 is in and of itself an achievement. Because behind that, the other thing that the UN is very good at is iteration. Iteration is very slow, but it's good at iteration because it has a long institutional memory stemming back to the end of the Second World War. Learnings are taken on board. For example, the Millennium Development Goals, that first set of eight goals which were promulgated in 2000, consisted of the least developed countries reporting on achievements to the United Nations, whereas the Sustainable Development Goals, this set of 17 goals, is

an agenda that's owned by developing, least developed, and developed countries. It's public sector and it's private sector. Corporations have also taken up or recognized responsibilities under the Sustainable Development Goals and the reporting on those as well. I think that's a major step forward. Academics are also playing a role with lots of research going into how to better achieve those goals and outcomes. And of course, NGOs have always been central to the achievement of development goals, including in this instance.

P. Verschure First, we have to establish goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals are a very good example of that. But you could also argue that that's just the lowest common denominator around which we could group all these heterogeneities in objectives, in interests, and so on, which means that the sustainable development goals, in the end, are so broad and ill-defined that they will give you little traction in the real world. Isn't that the continuous problem of compromise because you have a lot of hidden conflicting forces that you have to act against?

M. Jones You could look at it like that. I would say there's nothing wrong with sharing experience on the lowest common denominator because once you've got a good baseline, then you can keep building on that. But unless countries share in that common denominator, there will always be these large gaps in development status. I think you could use the current pandemic as a case in point. You can juxtapose nationalism with vaccine equity, for example, which is the difference between Australia wanting all Australians to be vaccinated versus making that vaccine available in the Pacific, to our nearest neighbors: that kind of juxtaposition is important to look at. Also, when you're fighting something new, like COVID, using the WHO as the platform for sharing scientific breakthroughs, for sharing experience on what works at the national level in different countries, and what could work by definition in different regions, because COVID is a virus and is going to spread more quickly in a given region, even as it does globally.

P. Verschure These things go together. You said that the United Nations is very good at iterating a process. This is how you would build up from the baseline to develop the collaboration. Over time, the participating players change continuously, because the process runs over a longer period of time than the presence of the individual players. Is that a reaction to overcoming this challenge of the lowest common denominator?

M. Jones Yes, I think it is. If we move now to the human rights context, countries have a requirement to report every four years on the discharging of their obligations under international treaties at the national level: how they've changed legislation, regulation, administrative instructions to bring themselves into alignment with their international treaty obligations. And that must be done every four years, irrespective of changes in government. I think that's important to remember: what countries are held to. It doesn't matter who's in power today. Left, right, center, it makes no difference. The country has a reporting requirement. There has to be what's called a progressive realization of rights. There has to be progression. When countries report on the realization of human rights obligations at the national level, the committees under the treaties share, they make observations, and they share how other countries have overcome the obstacles that that country may identify as being an impediment to their realization of rights. It's a really good forum for countries to feel the pressure. They report, they draw down new information on how they can improve, and apply that over the next three or four years. Then they report again. There is that progressive, iterative movement through the achievement of goals, whether it's sustainable development goals or human rights goals. The UN also hosts regional meetings to further accelerate the realization of those goals. This is useful from the perspective of—you talked about heterogeneity before—any cultural-linguistic differences as well, because sometimes the feeling is expressed that you can't compare region A with region B because they are so different in terms of religion or language or many other factors. The UN is again the convening power in different regions for regional meetings as well as sharing knowledge.

- P. Verschure How does that translate to the actual day-to-day work you were doing when you were working on issues of female or women's empowerment? How does that translate to the internal working and how you reach out?
- M. Jones You raised a very good point before about "the people." Because I'll tell you one thing, collaboration really only works with the right mix of people. There can be this view that if you line up institution A, B, C, D, this natural progression will lead you to outcomes E and F or something like that. But I'm telling you from lots of experience, and working across a range of collaborations, it's the people at the table that will make that collaboration work or not. It's not just about the organizations or institutions, it is about the people who are sent or opting to represent those organizations. The most successful collaborations I've worked in have been with the people who will get out of bed at 3:00 a.m. and crawl across broken glass because this has to be done now. That gets back down to what I was talking about before about trust. Good leadership and trust. Trust that the vision that we've set for ourselves or the task before us can be achieved, no matter how onerous it may appear. Trust in each other that collectively, "alone I can go fast, but together we go far." Collectively we can achieve solid runs on the board. That is where the collaboration is. If you've got five people, it's no longer a collaboration between five people, it really is five organizations. And when you've got five organizations at the table, then you can get that longevity, that temporal aspect, which I think is really important. It goes beyond the people. I think good collaboration starts with the right people, the right entities, and then you can get those results over time.
- P. Verschure What are the traits of perfect collaborators? The right people? Could you give an example of how it worked around this notion of the people involved?
- M. Jones You have to correctly identify what you're solving for. What is the problem? Because if you get a good problem definition, then you can come up with a solution. In terms of the economic empowerment of women, there are 100 ways you could approach that. Working for the United Nations, for the Trade Institute, we had to achieve that through trade. One of the problems we had was ascertaining in which sectors women business owners are concentrated. Sitting at my desk in Geneva, how am I going to find that out? Because there was very little research on the topic. You know they're in textiles and clothing, but what else are they in? It's a bit anecdotal. Then you've got to figure out which organizations to work with. We chose to reach out to the International Federation of Business and Professional Women because it was the largest organization of business and professional women on the planet. Active in over 90 countries with 30,000 members, they were the first people I reached out to with an agreement to survey their members to find out what their sectors were. Also, at that time, we collaborated very closely with a group called WEConnect, a membership-based organization of corporations that wants to increase sourcing goods and services from companies owned by women. They are all about connecting women business owners with corporations, and they had the corporate networks. There we had the private sector. As the UN, we knew the supply side. We have deep connections into women business owners in developing and least developed countries. With the supply side sorted out, we needed guidance on the sectors, which we got through the feedback and survey of the International Federation of Professional Women. Working with WEConnect on the demand side and the corporations, we had our first meeting with only 27 people, the representatives of about 14 different organizations, to determine how we can move forward. We decided to focus on procurement, came up with some ideas around that, and started running annual meetings. To date She Trades has generated 80 million dollars' worth of sales from goods and services from companies owned by women in developing and least developed countries. That's pretty good, Paul. Eighty million dollars that otherwise wouldn't have gone into the pockets of women in the developing world.
- P. Verschure I understand. But you said earlier that what really matters to collaborate successfully is the people around that table. What was special about the people around that table that led to this success? What did they bring to the table to make that happen? Was it trust, for

instance? Was that the main thing, or was it also the sense of taking initiative, accepting risk? I don't know. I'm guessing.

M. Jones I think "I don't know, I'm guessing" is a good place to start. Because if you're looking to bring people around the table to collaborate on something, a good place to start is by recognizing we have a problem and saying, "I don't know. I'm guessing that this could be a way forward, but I really need the input of the people around this table to figure out what are the best chances of working going forward." In terms of the qualities in the people, humility goes a long way. Humility, experience, and then trust is built over time. First, it has to be trust in the vision to get people together, to be part of identifying the problem. What are the solutions to the problem? What are the options we have before us? Then out of that comes almost rules and regulations around how you make decisions, because that's an important part of the collaboration. There has to be a way to make decisions. I wouldn't necessarily say quickly, but it has to happen decisively so you can keep moving forward, and therefore there has to be trust in the leadership. That's also valuable.

P. Verschure Could you give an example of where it didn't work out because these features were absent?

M. Jones Yes, I think they just naturally fall apart. I've been involved in some nonstarters where there's an indication that we must do something, but certain parties just don't come to the table; they don't come to the meetings. Unless people turn up, they're not going to be able to agree.

P. Verschure Then you starve the process through your actions.

M. Jones Yes. You starve the process through your actions, which is a tactic also used by some players in different international contexts. It's the substance of the process.

P. Verschure In the example that you gave us, we speak about women's empowerment. The success of that story is, as you summarized it, to bring more money into the pockets of women. But do you also see that as a struggle against other forms of power and control that are maybe more dominated by males? Do you see that converge or do you see that diverge? Because that would suggest that there are two realms of collaboration, possibly, that will never meet. Then you have to support one realm more because the other one is very dominant, the top-down, power-based one. How do you look at that?

M. Jones I did a lot of work with governments, and I think first of all, in many instances, you need to get different ministries to agree to collaborate with you to achieve the common goal. It might sound like that should be automatic, but it isn't. Typically, the UN deals with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My link is with the Ministry of Trade. I did a lot of work in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture, and somewhere in there is usually the Ministry of Women's Affairs. It's four different ministries with four different briefs, and rarely do those four different ministers come into the same room around a topic like economic empowerment, and you need to convince them as to why that's important. If I go back to the example, one of the areas that came out of the survey in which women are concentrated was coffee. Then you have to look for an organization and bring them in, so we worked with the International Women's Coffee Alliance. Then I did some work in Uganda, Burundi, East Africa. Much of that was first through the doorway of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Minister of Trade. I talked to these ministers about how important it was for them to support this process of women's economic empowerment in their country, for them to recognize the role of women in the coffee value chain, that women do most of the work and that they are down at the very poorly paid end of that, and I asked ministers questions. I won't name the country, but one of the countries in East Africa decided to issue very lucrative export certificates, licenses to export coffee. They issued ten of them and they all went to men. I asked the minister of trade if that was intentional. He said that they made that information available through the Chamber of Commerce. How many women are part of the Chambers of Commerce? If you grind coffee in remote and by definition high altitude areas, typically miles from the capital, you don't even know about that because you don't

plug into that kind of a network. It was really talking about achieving outcomes across the value chain that are equitable, looking at the role of men and women there and ensuring that the information goes out to women. To your question on collaboration, how do you do that? Again, I think our role was bringing around the table the people who played key roles in coffee and getting them to recognize how important it was to have the women at the table. When we had those meetings, for example, invariably the women would say, “we work so hard on improving, on good agricultural practices to improve the quality and quantity of coffee. We get the stuff ready, we grow stuff, it goes into bags, and then the time it goes to market is typically a time when it rains heavily, the roads are washed out.” Having the Ministry of Public Works at the table, too, to recognize their role in women’s economic empowerment through the export of coffee, showed that this is a hugely collaborative effort that needed the support of the government to happen. In a very practical sense, you raise questions about men and women power dynamics. You see these play out in these meetings. These women are not used to speaking to men in power. Part of our role was engendering confidence in the women to be able to speak up, to help them articulate what their concerns were. This is the thing about the United Nations. Once you’ve built those relationships, you’ve got the confidence, trust, and you’ve shone light into a dark area. For example, how important it is to work for women’s economic empowerment by rebuilding feeder roads back up the hill so the coffee can come down. Then people realize the value of having been at the table, to be able to share the information. They also realize the value of some of the research that we did on the importance of women’s economic empowerment for breaking into generational poverty, women’s spending on their health, education of children, very important areas. It’s a big picture. I think that’s the thing about collaboration: once you get those parties together, once they start to listen, once they build a relationship within it themselves, this is the role of the UN to bring those people together. And then when they’re there, they stick as glue because export is so important in these countries. It is the top foreign exchange earner. And clearly, the education and health of children is very important. These collaborations tend to stick, to play out for the best over time.

P. Verschure It seems like you almost have a recipe: You start simple. You bring all the stakeholders together so that they have to communicate. Why, after 15 years, did you step out of that? These are important challenges for humanity where you were playing a relevant role. Did you step out because you thought that it is all solved now, and someone else can do it because the recipe is clear, or did you step out because it’s also a challenging and draining activity that you can only sustain for a certain amount of time?

M. Jones There was little known about gender and trade when I started working on it in 2000. I had a gut feeling that it was important; there was so little research and nothing was being done at the World Trade Organization at the time. I felt the need to fight in this important area. One of the first projects I worked on with the ITC [International Trade Centre] was to come up with a methodology for a gender-sensitive value chain analysis. Not just a value chain within coffee, but where women were along the value chain. I spent 15 years working with governments and people to build a structure now called She Trades, which has been on track for a few years now, and will hold another buyer-sellers meeting in Dubai in October. I am very passionate about building collaborations to tackle new problems; that’s perhaps a skill that I have. When the structures are in place, then I’m happy to pass them over. In addition to my work with Fairtrade, I am now working in Australia as a community engagement worker in COVID vaccination clinics. Our government has worked hard with the medical and scientific communities to do what they can to tackle the virus. As a community engagement worker in public housing, I work on the trust element. I work with people. We have very strict rules in Australia about who can and cannot get vaccinated. You can only get vaccinated in Australia if you’re over forty years old. In my role as the community engagement worker, for example, I spoke with the supervisor of the cleaning crews that go into public housing to clean and sterilize all the touchpoints. He asked me whether his staff could be vaccinated. Because most of them are under 30, the technical answer would be no. But it is my role to

speaking to the decision makers and making the case that it is important for public housing cleaning staff to be vaccinated, otherwise they're going to be vectors for disaster. In collaboration, there always has to be room to recognize the human factor and room for improvement. It can't be "cliquey." My whole life has been about collaboration centered on people. When we looked at coffee, it wasn't coffee as a commodity per se; a lot of money is going into good agricultural practices. Rather, it was looking at the people. What do the most vulnerable, most disadvantaged groups in that value chain lack? Since ITC doesn't do finance, we brokered the first-ever sale of a million dollars' worth of coffee from an association of women coffee growers in Burundi. We helped set it up, to plug them into banking and finance options because there aren't many banks in remote rural areas where coffee is grown, and women typically don't have bank accounts in many of those places. You can talk about economic empowerment, but you can also expose people to vulnerability, to attack, quite literally, if they have money but don't have a place to store it.

P. Verschure You're focusing on the community trying to build trust, but trust in what? What do you want people to trust?

M. Jones Each member of a collaboration either opts in or out. Opting-in requires sharing a common vision. You can share a common vision, but you also have to believe in the leadership, that group, or person, and trust the vision that's been articulated. And one would hope you've had some role in discussing that with the other members of the collaboration and the leadership. It's trust in the vision and trust in the leadership.

P. Verschure There is an ethical issue as well. You are mediating for your government, who is imposing certain measures in response to this emergency. You might not necessarily always agree with them, or find them limiting. On the other hand, you know people have to support them. There has to be compromise in order for us all to get through this with minimal damage. Where do ethics come into the decision making? I see the bidirectionality: you speak to the people in the community and the representatives of the system, even when that system is not working in a way that you think is proper. Where would you draw that line?

M. Jones Mostly it is arguing for the exceptions to the rules. Each case is different. Our government says that only people over 40 can be vaccinated, unless there are certain circumstances like health issues. Because I understand the system, I can be that voice for the cleaners. For collaboration around COVID, there needs to be entry points and that is my role. In terms of ethics, because I'm part of the COVID decision-making vaccination world, if you like, it comes down to knowing the players and how far they will go. It's the call on your own ethics: when you want to push and how hard.

P. Verschure There might be aspects of Australian politics and governance that you don't agree with, but you have to communicate trust to community members: to trust the system, to assume it means well, to assume it has our best interests at heart.

M. Jones Then you're back to science. Take the AstraZeneca vaccine, for example. It can cause blood clots in very rare cases, but it isn't around the typical clotting modalities, like deep vein thrombosis and illnesses like that. It has to do with platelets in the blood, which is very different from thrombosis. It's trusting the government, trusting the science, and taking that to the community and saying, "listen, AstraZeneca presents some risks. But if you get COVID your ten times more likely to get blood clots." Relaying information back into the community.

P. Verschure That means you build on the truth of the scientific evidence that you communicate to community members. Yet, there is an onslaught right now of disinformation in that domain. How do you deal with this?

M. Jones What I've pitched to our management is that you need to bring in community leaders from a range of diverse backgrounds. There needs to be engagement, even with those who hold views the furthest from your own. Because if you don't engage, then you ostracize, and that can lead to its own set of problems. What I have found is that people just want to be heard.

Once they've been heard, that's all they really need, no matter what their views are. Once they have told whatever that their truth is, it seems to in some way diffuse them. That doesn't mean you have to integrate that into your own template for what it is you're going to deliver. But you will need to build out a bubble that talks about how to engage that group of people in the discussion as you move forward, even if it's in the opposite direction to what they want.

P. Verschure What you seem to express is respect, if you want the agency of every individual in that process. But to be heard also means I am acknowledged and affirmed as a human being with my opinion. Does it come down to something relatively straightforward: that we don't listen enough to each other?

M. Jones In many ways, problems with collaboration come with the digital age; before you could get people in a room. For example, you go to conferences because you're asked to speak, but the real joy of going to conferences is the discussions at the margins. That's where the frontiers are. The frontiers are discussed because these ideas haven't yet been fully formed. Nobody's giving a paper on this yet because it's coming together, and you can feel it coming together, but it hasn't quite stuck yet. Those in-person meetings are so rich in what you learn, obviously in the main plenaries and in the workshops as well, but certainly in the discussions at the margins, where you get the electricity of thought. I've missed that during the COVID lockdown. And the flip side, unfortunately, has been brought out with some of the antics of Cambridge and Analytica and the "persuadables." It is the antithesis of electricity of thought and exploration of frontier knowledge and what could crystallize, this phenomenon of the persuadables: being persuaded by a campaign launched over social media that creates an ever-expanding understanding of something that is fundamentally false. Depending on your education system, you've either been trained or not in analytical thinking or critical thinking. And if you haven't, and if you surround yourself with like-minded people, whether that's virtually or literally or physically—it's more virtually than not—where are the counterpoints?

P. Verschure We're still in the COVID crisis. Hopefully the tail end. You're also engaged with an NGO [nongovernmental organization]. What are the lessons? Do you have a rule book for yourself? Do you say, given my experience with the UN and with COVID, we've seen how things don't work, so now I have a new rule book: I should change how I approach building collaboration in certain ways. Do you have such a rule book right now, or new rules in the rule book?

M. Jones I just have experience in the rule book. I worked for the United Nations. If you want to talk about difference, by definition, it's all there: nationality, religion, language, anything. Coming back to Australia, I'm now an Australian in Australia; it is a different thing. What I see here is that people tend toward people who look like themselves or speak like themselves. There is still this grouping thing. To form collaborations that are going to affect change over time, those bonds, these seeming bonds, need to be broken and people need to be brought in, or at least offered the opportunity to participate in collaborations, to achieve a common objective. You can't have one group of people calling the shots. Not in this country; we're very diverse. You really need to have all sorts of difference represented in our decision-making processes in this country, and that's what I'm trying to do today in my role.

P. Verschure This comes back to the balance between running fast on your own or running further in collaboration, and there might be collisions sometimes. Maybe you can see clearly how things might go off the rails. You could run fast on your own to try to mitigate that, or instead you could say that we still have to fuel this collaborative process, and maybe even make some mistakes, to come out better at the end. How do you balance that?

M. Jones Each member of a collaboration has their own terms of reference. That to me, is what collaboration is. In my first example of the International Trade Center, we were the platform. We had the International Women's Coffee Alliance [IWCA] working on coffee. We had WEConnect working with the large corporations; these kinds of things. This is the thing: it's

not my role to tell the different entities how to do their job. This is with the benefit of nation experience potentially. It's not so much a slowing down as it is a rearticulation that reminds people of our common objective, why it's important, and to celebrate the wins. That's the other thing about collaboration: you have to celebrate the wins and interpret them in the language of the different entities. For example, that contract for a million dollars' worth of coffee out of Burundi is really important for the IWCA. That reverberated throughout their membership. When the corporate board was able to secure those contracts, it was celebrated in that community as well. It's about celebrating collectively, but also as individual entities.

P. Verschure There is a trade-off in this balancing of running fast on your own or in a small group or being good at getting further. Some of the crises we are facing, like COVID and the global climate crisis, are real emergencies. We might not have that much time. Does this mean that at some point we have to say sorry, collaboration is important, but we just don't have the time to make it happen. We have to go top-down and impose. Is that something that you see in the future? Or do you think that we have enough time to address these fundamental challenges in a collaborative fashion?

M. Jones There are different groups acting on climate change. It's a matter of how they all come together, whether it's COP 21 [Conference of the Parties] or some other entity where decisions can be made. Decisions must be made, and that's what I was saying before about one of the features of collaboration being leadership, people's trust in leadership, and trust that a decision has been made and that it is followed through on. There have been times when as a leader, I have had different people, members of the collaboration come up with an emergency that needs to be solved right now and I have made decisions and called the shots. And there has been different feedback on that; for example, that they were not consulted. But this is one of the qualities of leadership. Leaders should be people who can lead. I mean, it sounds ridiculous, but that's what I'm saying. I think leaders should be able to lead. We do need to collaborate; we need to consult; that's hugely important. One of the hallmarks of a good leader is to ensure that the right people are in the room, that all of the people who need to be in the room are in the room. Then you can further break them down into working groups on A,B,C,D. If there are too many people just break into different working groups and let them identify which part of the collaboration they want to pick up and work on. Manage that; coordinate that. Making a call when you have to is extremely important. That's how we're facing climate change. From Germany and Belgium with the recent rain and the flooding to other countries which have been experiencing the brunt of this. I live very close to the Pacific now. Countries are going underwater.

P. Verschure In your experience, who stands out as leaders who get it right, and what made them stand out? Could you give examples?

M. Jones The New Zealand prime minister. Look at that woman. She's a woman-and-a-half, that one. When that Australian guy shot and massacred people worshipping in the mosque, she donned a hijab and spoke of the sorrow, and she refused to say his name. That kind of leadership. She was the first person, if I recall correctly, to shut down a city, let alone a country, in response to COVID. She called that very early. When small businesses close, they bleed, and the ramifications are vast. I lead the development of the cut-flower category at Fairtrade. We're setting up Fairtrade certifying for cut roses into Australia. It's a new category on top of coffee, tea, chocolate and all the rest that Fairtrade does. Our florists are closed. We're in lockdown. It's the fifth lockdown in Victoria. That causes enormous hardship to the florists in Victoria as well as at the farm level. We import roses from East Africa. I've got a project funded by the Enhanced Integrated Framework, which is part of the WTO in Ethiopia. You know where Ethiopia is right now. It's in dire straits; Tigray problems and so on. We lock down in Melbourne and we have the echoes in East Africa. So anyway, leadership: Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister.

- P. Verschure Jacinda Ardern is number one on the list. Do you have other examples? Or is she so exemplary, and far above the rest?
- M. Jones I think Amma, in India, the hugging saint. One of the many reasons why I think she's amazing is that she has that amazing university down in Kerala. She's built a hospital and a university, and she integrated the neuroscience part of the university into the hospital. It's actually not on the university grounds at all; it's in the hospital because she wanted to see the academics working very closely with the problems and solving real problems, with astonishing outcomes. They have a little probe where they can test for skin cancers on the lips from chewing betel nuts. That's, I think, the way she conceives: she conceptualizes not only problems but solving problems. Her amazing ability to mobilize millions in that regard is astonishing as well, which speaks to something else. We've been largely talking about governmental responses, and we have completely ignored the power of religion to convene. Clearly, there is a line there as well.
- P. Verschure Globally, and certainly in the Western world, religion is losing ground. What are the alternative frameworks that we can deploy to restabilize large-scale collaboration?
- M. Jones In Australia, for example, Anglicare, the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church, which are big players in aged care, have provided strong responses, collaborating with the government on management of COVID in care facilities here. The Church, at least in Australia, retains quite a lot of influence. I was going to say power, but I think it's more influence these days. It is still very active in areas such as homelessness and so on. It's on the decline, but I think it's a function of individualism in many ways. This involves more than religion, picking and choosing spirituality over religion, whatever that may mean to them. I don't think that that's going to last long to tell you the truth. Whether it's Confucianism, Islam, Christianity, or any one of a number of faiths with a long history, there will be a renaissance of traditional religions in the not too distant future, as people get frustrated with the outcomes of selecting or picking and choosing and what they think is going to work for them.
- P. Verschure To cross the finish line, do you believe humans will ever be able to collaborate in a sustainable way on a global scale? Is it even possible?
- M. Jones We collaborate. Sustainability is a concept that is now taking root in the minds of just about everybody on the planet. Awareness is growing as we look at things like microplastics in fish, the impact of the changing weather patterns, etc. We're starting to realize that sustainability needs to be integrated into all aspects of decision making, particularly decision making done by groups who are collaborating to achieve an outcome. I think whatever the outcome was that we were looking for before, whatever goal collaborations were coming together to achieve before, there's going to need to be a stronger understanding of an integration of sustainability into the process of realizing that goal. The work of the Convergence Science Network is important because I think that, in particular, there's very little work being done on the science of collaboration. It's timely, Paul, that you're asking what the basic pillars of collaboration are. If sustainability has not yet been integrated into collaboration, then it needs to be a factor that is urgently considered. For example, looking at how to dispose of the billions of masks that are being discarded—different ways of dealing with the biohazard waste in Australia: it costs four hundred dollars to dispose of a thirty-five-liter garbage bag of biohazard waste, which is what we use when we change masks and gloves, and so on. That's 400 dollars a go; that's really expensive. The science is important; what you're looking at now is important. If you can weave in sustainability, I think that would be a big win for the planet.
- P. Verschure But do you believe humans will be able to do it, to collaborate?
- M. Jones We do, Paul. I don't know how much political science you've done, but if you go way back to social contract theory, that's what we do. We give up some of our rights to be governed by a sovereign. It's always been about the protection of property, whether it's your physical property or you yourself as property in terms of enslavement. It's just basic social contract

theory. We've always collaborated with each other to defend against the other as well, against the attacker. That's political science 101 and I think that's a big part of collaboration as well. I mean, you need to watch something like Mars Attacks or one of those movies where there's some existential threat coming from afar and then all of a sudden we're pushed to collaborate. You don't have to watch Mars Attacks; you can just use COVID as a case in point. I believe in the United Nations as the platform for collaboration because no matter what it is, if it's a threat to peace and security, or a threat to health, the UN has been successful, and humanity has been successful.

P. Verschure You say we can do it as long as we're under threat.

M. Jones Yes.

P. Verschure As long as there's a threat, we can do it. But if you could change one thing in humans to make them more effective in collaborating, what you would change?

M. Jones "Listen" is the first thing that comes to mind. Have people be a little bit more patient and listen. No, no, no—I'd say compassion. If I could turn up the volume on anything, it would be compassion. Because I think if people were more compassionate, they would, by definition, listen more. If I looked at you, Paul, and if I didn't see a Caucasian male, if I wasn't blocked by what I see, if I wasn't reacting either positively or negatively against what I see, if I looked at you thought there's someone who could catch COVID—if I saw everybody in front of me as somebody who could catch COVID, I think that would amp up the compassion. Compassion can be something that can overcome the visual order or linguistic or different accents, and so on, or reactions against wearing a cross or a hijab, etc. Compassion. If you're looking at collaboration, if you're looking to achieve a goal, if humans could be more compassionate, we would collaborate more easily. We could perhaps also have compassion for our planet and work more effectively on sustainable outcomes as well.

P. Verschure Meg Jones, thank you very much for this conversation.

M. Jones Thank you very much.