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Change, Power, Systems, and Politics

Insights from the Podcasts[1]

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> Let's look at the process. It's not that I have an idea of how a project should look like and then basically infiltrate or dump it on the team. A project evolves through a process replete with iterations, joint thinking, out-of-the-box thinking. Trial and error is also involved to some degree. When certain aspects fail, this needs to be analyzed: Why didn't I get buy-in from my counterparts? Why didn't they support the idea? For me, it may have been the absolutely logical and correct thing to do, but when pushback happens, you need to assess what's driving this. How can we make it work? (A. Nuyken, 24:05)

Collaboration is a complex process, deeply rooted in trust, aligned objectives, and the ability to navigate the intricacies of human dynamics. The process is held together by trust or possibly fear, as in the "cage fights" of high-energy physics experiments, where all parties are "condemned to one another" (S. de Jong). To guide the collaborative process, Eva Wiecko establishes effective lines of communication and builds trust with organizational leaders. Fresh perspectives are brought to the attention of organizational leaders, adjusted to the depth of the relationship and the assessment of how open one can be in giving feedback. In all cases, deliberate communication is used to ensure that feedback is not perceived as offensive, with attention given to being sensitive to the hierarchical and cultural nuances of the organizations and people involved. This entails ensuring that the collaborative project is executable within a certain timeline and that difficult issues that may endanger the process itself are only communicated when necessary. Interestingly, the shift to remote video meetings has helped to dismantle some established cultural rituals, making

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[1] Podcasts are available at https://esforum.de/forums/ESF32_Collaboration.html ?opm=1_3. Here, key positions are attributed to individual interviewees; block quotes are cited using the timestamp from the podcasts (minute:second).

meetings more content-driven and less hierarchical. Over time, this might contribute to a more meritocratic culture.

Collaboration requires understanding and respect for diversity (e.g., M. Jones, C. Hedegaard). Meg Jones suggests that the success of collaboration hinges on recognizing and respecting each participant's unique contributions. Reinforcing this, Connie Hedegaard stresses the necessity for a shared perception of problems and a deep understanding of each other's interests, particularly in the political sphere where consensus is key to progress. The process of collaboration further requires openness and reciprocity (A. Sparrow, M. Levi). Annie Sparrow notes the need to set aside egos and seek expertise from others, while Margaret Levi stresses the importance of reaching a common understanding of facts and engaging in civil discourse. Both imply that the collaboration process is psychological and practical, involving the readiness to reciprocate and share interests.

The collaboration process is critically dependent on a shared perspective, which is continuously challenged by ego and a lack of a common view. For instance, Luke Sciulli recounts how collaboration can break down when people cannot accept their role and thus act against it because they perceive that their ideas or actions are not accepted. The collaboration process suffers when there are conflicts in leadership and personal egos. This points to the challenge of managing personalities and the potential fragility of teamwork, even in disciplines where discipline and unity are highly valued and reinforced.

In summary, the podcasts collectively articulated that successful collaboration is not simply a methodical and pragmatic process but also a psychological journey that demands trust, a common vision, mutual respect, and an authentic engagement with diversity. The insights offered expose a level of complexity that is often underappreciated: managing conflicts and egos constructively is imperative to effective collaboration leadership.

Change

Collaboration is, by necessity, a process of change—of circumstances and participants and the very dynamics involved in the collaboration process. Recognizing this, the interviewees discussed the role of change in collaboration in various contexts, highlighting the dynamic nature of collaborative efforts and the need for adaptability among participants. Connie Hedegaard notes that understanding the interests of others and accepting that one cannot have everything their own way is crucial for progress, suggesting that the ability to change perspectives and approaches is necessary for effective collaboration. In particle physics, the adage that "one is condemned to one another" creates a coercive force that can change attitudes by force and requires an ability to cope and reconcile after inevitable disagreements and conflicts (S. de Jong). The particle physics example is an outlier in the model of collaboration.

Margaret Levi points out that collaboration can fail when there is a lack of shared understanding about facts and reality, indicating that change in how information is processed and shared can be critical for successful collaboration. In addition, feeling efficacious and believing that engagement can lead to meaningful action are necessary, which may require changes in how collaborative actions are structured and perceived. Collaboration also requires change at the individual level, in terms of beliefs and tolerance, which can improve the collaborative process. Jônatas Manzolli suggests that enhancing the capacity to believe in others and increasing tolerance would enable humans to collaborate better.

Institutional change was reviewed from various perspectives to analyze the challenges and complexities involved in altering established systems. For instance, Theo Mulder reflected on the difficulty of changing long-standing institutions, such as those in the sciences and humanities, which have been stable for centuries. When attempting to create the Royal Academy Center of Humanities, Mulder faced significant resistance and negative press and noted that factors like institutional inertia, tradition, and the conservative nature of scientists contributed to the reticence to this new endeavor. In such cases, to effect change often requires engaging with a broader set of stakeholders. Deepa Narayan emphasized that it is important for large organizations to reflect values of love and power but also pointed out that new network-like organizations are needed to provide bottom-up pressure for change. She highlighted the role of grassroots organization, networking, and coordinated actions in bringing about change, even in the absence of clear leadership or top-down directives. Margaret Levi also touched on the role of institutions, not as entities that completely shape behavior but as ones that enable or block certain actions. She argues that institutions can facilitate the emergence of norms within an organization or government, which in turn can shape behavior and prevent or support change. In another context, Martin McKee implied that significant shifts in institutional structures and politics are necessary to address broader societal issues that require large-scale, cross-sector collaboration, political leadership, and international discourse. Stakeholder capitalism was advanced as a model where the interests of all stakeholders (e.g., employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community) can be taken into account in a company's governance and decision-making processes rather than focusing solely on shareholder profits. McKee suggests that this approach is required for reengaging with society and addressing global challenges. It requires a shift in institutional structures and politics that involves reforming capital markets and considering the roles of various stakeholders in the economy. Alexander Nuyken and Eva Wiecko, experts in changing large-scale cooperations, show how difficult it is to implement change within such large commercial enterprises.

The most surprising observation on change in collaboration came from Rob Van der Laarse, who discussed the concept of collaboration in the context of memory studies and conflict history. He provided a nuanced view of

collaboration, particularly during times of armed conflict and territorial occupation, where it often carries negative connotations. Van der Laarse explained that the notion of collaboration is linked to the origins of the nation-state and how collaboration, which is generally seen as a positive interaction, can become associated with betrayal or treason, especially in historical contexts such as World War II. This perspective challenges the typical understanding of collaboration as inherently constructive and reveals the moral complexities and judgments that can arise depending on the context, point of view, and circumstances (see also Chapter 4, this volume).

Change is an integral aspect of individual, collective, and institutional collaboration. Whether in perception, attitude, information processing, or individual capacities, change allows for individual agility, resilience, adaptability, and the ability to overcome challenges that arise during the collaborative process. Conversely, institutional change, in its multifaceted complexity, requires top-down and bottom-up approaches to manage stakeholder engagement and the shift in values and organizational culture needed for intra- and interinstitutional collaboration. Such approaches extend beyond mere structural adjustments and involve psychological, social, cultural, and political considerations.

Power

Embedded within the collaborative process is a complex landscape of power dynamics. Deepa Narayan introduced a power and love dialectic in collaboration, and noted that a balance between the two is crucial. She warned, however, that power without love can be abusive, whereas love without power can be weak. For Narayan, effective collaboration involves establishing clear rules and boundaries underpinned by trust, love, and dignity. She discussed the concept of authority in the context of education, describing it as an asymmetric power relationship where the teacher controls the class. She suggests that this traditional model of authority is easy to change and related it to the broader question of filling societal voids that were once occupied by religious or political–ideological commitments. Underlying this change, she views human longing for connection as a fundamental need that could fill this void, emphasizing the importance of being valued and appreciated as part of human existence. Nandita Chaudhary expanded on this relationship within the context of Indian families. Here, the power and authority that the older generation exerts on the younger needs to follow a sense of justice, despite hierarchical structures, for there to be genuine and happy collaboration. The balance of authority and love prevents conflicts, especially when resources are limited.

Naina Agrawal-Hardin distinguished between "power over" and "power with." In the Sunrise movement, collaboration is viewed as building "power with" the community. A fundamental value of Sunrise is collective empowerment rather than dominance. This form of power is crucial for movements

to enact change, addressing issues with unity and shared vision rather than through antagonism. The concept of "power with" focuses on building collective strength and shared goals within a group, whereas "power over" involves exerting influence or control over external entities and implies an adversarial relation. The act of exerting "power over" can be a necessary component to strengthen "power with," as it helps to identify a common challenge, thereby uniting the group. This dynamic could make the "power with" inherently unstable, as it inevitably introduces an adversarial element into the collaboration. Indeed, Rafael Malpica-Padilla urges the deconstruction of power systems that impose one group's will over another, advocating for a collaborative space where differences are engaged with respect and common ground is sought. This raises the fundamental question of power distribution in collaborative settings. Meg Jones spoke to the need for a nonhierarchical nature of power in large collaborations, where roles are defined democratically and persuasion is more valued than authority. An example of collegial yet structured decision making was provided by Sten Grillner, who described the Nobel Prize selection process. This inherently collaborative activity utilizes a structured democratic approach to manage power dynamics within the Nobel Committee that is both inclusive and equitable. Yet, this process assumes that all committee members behave responsibly and in good faith, which creates vulnerabilities, as evidenced by the "civil war" that raged in the committee in 2017, after it awarded the Nobel Prize for literature:

> [T]he academy got into a civil war and a lot of people left. The secretary left. It almost collapsed, but then it was refurnished by adding new members and then it's probably on track again.…Literature, of course, it's very difficult. It's so much simpler with science. (S. Grillner, 19:09)

Grillner pointed out the difference in the rules governing the various committees' membership. The Swedish Academy appoints five members to the committee that selects the Nobel Prize in literature, who have a lifetime appointment and cannot resign. This is considered a special case as membership on the committees that award prizes in science, physics, chemistry, and medicine rotate and have experienced very few problems. The Swedish Academy itself consists of only 18 permanent members, with varying levels of commitment. Grillner observed that it was actually quite impressive that work proceeded so well for so many years.

The podcast participants discussed the role of power in the management of scarce resources in various ways. Deepa Narayan described the role of power in resource management, particularly in the context of domestic water supplies to villages and urban areas as well as irrigation, where the source of conflicts is often the proximity to the resource. She emphasized that enforcing rules is not enough and that social connections and social capital which foster trust between groups are vital to preventing conflict and encouraging cooperation. If these are absent and there is ill will, then perpetual conflict is likely. In her

opinion, goodwill, which comes through mutual relations in other realms, is necessary to provide a basis for reciprocity and trust. Without these elements, the struggle will intensify as resources become scarce, and collaboration becomes less feasible, leading to a situation where the strongest or those with the most resources prevail, creating a winner-and-loser framework. Meg Jones talked about the dynamics of power in the context of women's economic empowerment and resource management in the coffee industry. She described how bringing different stakeholders, including government representatives, to the table can highlight the importance of women's roles in the economy and address power imbalances by ensuring that women's voices are heard and their needs are met. In a particular example the need for infrastructure (e.g., feeder roads for transporting coffee) was mentioned. Power imbalances can be counteracted, at least partially, by clearly defining roles and objectives; there also needs to be an emphasis on the informal rules, which are based on trust and mutual respect, that maintain collaboration and prevent it from falling prey to power struggles.

In summary, the interviewees collectively portray power in collaboration as a complex interplay between authority, empathy, reciprocity, respect, and shared goals. A balance between "power over" and "power with," complemented by love, trust, and shared values, is essential to sustain collaborative efforts. Whether through democratic participation, collective empowerment, or the deconstruction of traditional power hierarchies, effective collaboration requires both an understanding and careful management of power dynamics.

Systems, Organizations, and Institutions

Collaboration evolves within systems, organizations, and institutions. Annie Sparrow criticized the International Olympic Committee (IOC): its lack of interest in health, public health, or global health impairs efforts to collaborate toward these common goals. IOC's focus on maximizing commercial success and maintaining control leaves no openness to collaboration or accountability. Sparrow contrasts this with her experience in polio vaccination campaigns, where collaboration across lines of armed conflict was essential. In the case of the polio campaign during the civil war in Syria, a collective effort was implemented to vaccinate children even in areas under government control, thus demonstrating common understanding and trust among those involved across the boundaries of the conflict. Despite the political agenda and institutional inertia that characterizes entities such as the United Nations and the IOC, Sparrow emphasizes the importance of not giving up on evidence-based positions and the need to hold such organizations accountable for their actions. Meg Jones profiled the role of the UN in fostering collaboration, its convening power, and the challenges it faces due to its vast size and under-resourced state. The overarching goal of the UN is peace and security, and the factors that can impact this

are complex and unpredictable (e.g., globalization, geopolitical events, health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, and resource conservation issues). She highlighted the importance of the UN's iterative processes in achieving collaboration toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the need to leverage cross-sectorial collaborations between private and public sectors, academics, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to achieve these goals. Despite difficulties, the institution provides a common frame of reference for all participants, counterbalancing individual differences.

In a discussion of the European Commission (EC) and its role in fostering collaboration for the common good in various contexts, Heidi Keller invites us not to view ourselves as the center of the world but to develop a genuine interest in others. She suggests that increasing our awareness and interest in our fellow human beings can improve collaboration. This can be applied to the role of the EC in fostering a sense of community and shared interest among member states in this pan-European experiment in democracy. Drawing on her experience with collaboration in the context of the EC and the broader European Union (EU), Connie Hedegaard used as an example the process of creating legislation to set car standards and the negotiations involved, particularly with stakeholders (e.g., car companies, consumer associations, insurance companies). She explained that all parties understand that it is in their mutual interest to collaborate and work out solutions. Driving this understanding is the industry's fear that without their input, politicians might implement unfavorable regulations, while the EC recognizes the need to involve industry to avoid mobilizing opposition from workers and regional politicians. Hedegaard emphasized that in the European tradition, it is rare for one party to get everything it wants; parties understand the need to give and take to reach a fair deal. Additionally, Hedegaard noted that the mechanisms to arrive at a decision within the EU are not as different from national contexts as one might assume: interests and lobbyists are stronger at the European level since the collective power of industry considerations exceed that of each individual member state. Despite the larger scale and stronger lobbying forces, the tools to make policy are similar, and the time it takes to pass significant legislation is not necessarily longer at the European level than at the national level. The EC must build on a shared understanding of problems, particularly in the political sphere, where collaboration is less about individual wins and more about collective progress through negotiation and compromise, providing a context for a comprehensive, multitiered approach to joint efforts.

Contrasting this view, Rob Van der Laarse emphasized the difference between cooperation and collaboration; while European countries cooperate, true collaboration, which involves sharing expertise to address and fix real problems, is needed. He suggests that collaboration should be reinvented at every level, including in education and environmental sustainability, to address practical issues such as the sustainability of buildings, natural resources, or forests (see also Chapter 12, this volume). Van der Laarse sees the potential for the EC

to facilitate this kind of collaboration, which could be more effective than the current cooperation system.

> It is essential to bring people together from all the different parts of Europe; in this collective (e.g., parliament), do not let them speak their own language or be part of these fictive parties.…The only way to exact success is to enable these people to collaborate on every European level. If it's a school system…you could create these kinds of collaborations. Not fictive cooperation (e.g., between a Dutch town and a French town, or between Eastern European towns). This is nonsense. Create a collaboration where expertise can be shared to address and fix real problems. Environmental sustainability could be very practical.…This is what you want to have in a very keen way in geopolitics. This kind of collaboration should be reinvented into what is really meant by collaboration. If you're a company, for instance, you don't want to have people in different departments unaware of what they do for each other, like the university, which still works with this craziness of disciplines.…But as scientists, we even have difficulty explaining to our colleagues in our own university what we're actually doing. We are maybe the only Europeans, Paul. (R. Van der Laarse, 01:23:08)

Collaboration gets consolidated in organizational structures, such as the UN and EC, by the sense of a common fate defined by shared global challenges. When there is alignment on an overarching goal of the collective (e.g., environmental issues or social justice), different groups can come together and recognize that their fates and destinies are entwined. This kind of collaboration can lead to collective action around larger societal questions. Organizations such as the UN and the EC have the potential to play a significant role in promoting true collaboration for the common good by facilitating the sharing of expertise, aligning goals, and fostering a sense of shared destiny among countries. Yet, the experiences of the interviewees show that there are clear challenges and failures in how these organizations instill collaboration, demonstrating a need for improvement.

In the context of the CERN council, rules are very strongly regulated, with requirements for how far in advance a point must be brought up and the necessity for some subjects to go through multiple discussion cycles before any decision can be taken (S. de Jong). Having clear rules that cannot be circumvented ensures that things are properly discussed, which helps to position the discussion and to avoid errors and problems. This will obviously not work with unwritten rules. Such rules and procedures are seen as crucial in shaping collaboration, as they provide a framework within which collaboration can occur effectively, as Sten Grillner also illustrated.

Luke Sciulli offered a comparative analysis of collaborative structures, drawing from his military experience to underscore the high level of organization and shared goals that drive successful teamwork. He contrasted this with the civilian sector, where the motivation for collaboration varies more widely, which indicates that the context and stakes significantly shape the collaborative process. In his view, excellence is a core value of successful collaboration, especially in

difficult circumstances. This view was supported by Ilona Schmiel, the artistic director of the Tonhalle-Orchestra Zürich, who observed that balance is required in an orchestra and that a hierarchical structure may well limit the degrees of freedom in the collaborative process. For the highest quality of collaboration to emerge, participants must have as much freedom as possible; otherwise, they are just executing a task. This implies that the organization of a collaboration should be designed to maximize an individual's freedom and contribution while maintaining an overall coherent structure. For this to work, though, each participant must excel in their role; this places weight on the selection process.

The pivotal role of institutions and regulations in nurturing trust and collaboration was elaborated on by Margaret Levi, Ron Poroptich, and Alexander Nuyken. Levi addressed the challenges of implementing effective rules and norms, particularly when scaling up to larger collectives. She emphasized that both formal and informal institutions (i.e., the rules of the game and the norms that govern the group) are absolutely critical ingredients in collaboration. She points out that while we know much about these formal rules and norms in various settings, scaling them up remains challenging. Levi's interest in collaborative work, as realized by trade unions, involves interactions with people one might never get to know or who can never reciprocate, yet with whom one needs to act cooperatively as if their interests are one's own. She underscored two crucial ingredients for collaboration: recognizing common interests and acting on those common interests. According to Levi, institutions that encompass formal rules and informal norms are fundamental to collaboration success. She distinguished between types of institutions similar to top-down versus bottom-up: some enforce societal regulations, whereas others evolve from social interactions and influence norms within organizations or governments.

Institutions and their norms influence behavior, which suggests that the ethical inclinations within a society can be influenced by the costs associated with certain behaviors (e.g., the actions of conscientious objectors during wartime). This indicates that institutions can enable or disable certain ethical commitments, shaping leaders' moral grounding within those institutions, the attitudes of the stakeholders, and the possibility and feasibility of collaboration. Poropatich described how an institutional ethos is maintained in the military, where there is a strong emphasis on mission focus and the critical requirement of collaboration. These core values are shared among colleagues and instilled in mantra-like rules, such as "be bold, be brief, be gone." This ethos accompanies the view that keeps politics out of military decision making; military leaders are trusted to guide missions relevant to national security and societal needs.

Levi contrasts the participatory nature of unions (where decisions are made through collective argument and engagement) with the more authoritarian top-down approach taken by governments (which can hinder the proper flow and questioning of information). She explains that institutions govern group behavior and are crucial, especially when collaboration is expanded

to larger or more dispersed groups, and direct reciprocity or personal relationships are impossible. Through established rules, institutions can maintain engagement and deter free riding; to inspire active and wholehearted participation, however, more than rules might be needed. Institutions do not entirely dictate behavior; they can facilitate or hinder actions based on individuals' motivations and ethical commitments. Institutions can promote willing adherence to societal demands if there is a functioning system of trust and accountability, including penalties for free riders and others who act against the organization's mission and values, thus supporting individuals to act ethically and effectively.

Nuyken highlighted how regulatory frameworks can engender trust by ensuring standardization and quality, a fundamental requirement for the success of services and investment opportunities. He argues that regulation is necessary, for instance, to prevent fraud and protect people from entering into risky commitments (e.g., investments) that they may not fully understand. A regulated environment ensures that opportunities are thoroughly tested and checked, which helps engender trust between the service provider and the consumer. Nuyken also points out that regulation can help identify and exclude wrongdoers from the market early in the process; this benefits all sides of the market and helps establish norms. Furthermore, he suggests that regulation can instill collaboration when it provides a seal of approval, indicating that an organization is part of a regulated environment. This allows people to trust standardized or systematic services without needing to know the details, as they can be assured that things are being done properly. He contrasts this with a "cowboy-style" environment, where the lack of common standards and quality monitoring makes it difficult for individuals to decide where to commit, take risks, invest, or purchase services. The same holds for data protection, where stakeholders must have confidence in the regulation to trust that their data is secure and not being misused.

Further insights into group dynamics were provided by Margaret Levi, Heidi Keller, and Meg Jones, who stress the importance of groups in managing individual contributions and fostering shared identities, essential for achieving common objectives. Trust within these groups is critical to open communication and effective collaboration. Luke Sciulli and Eva Wiecko added depth to this discussion by examining collaboration at different organizational levels. Sciulli's experience illustrates that while collaboration is uniformly structured in the military, the civilian sector experiences more fluid and diverse collaborative interactions. Wiecko's insights into boardroom dynamics affirm the need for an organized approach that honors individual autonomy and contributions across all levels.

In summary, the effectiveness of collaboration is contingent on the management of power relations, the organization of diverse roles, and the presence of supportive and transparent institutions supported by effective regulations. The ability to navigate the varying levels of collaboration, from strategic board decisions to operational tasks, is crucial for achieving common objectives. While

the structure and nature of collaboration may differ across systems, organizations, and institutions, the underlying principles of shared understanding, trust, and roles are universal to successful collaborative efforts.

Politics of Collaboration: How To Change and Influence Collaboration

Politics plays an intricate role in collaboration, particularly in the context of policy making, power structures, and the attainment of common goals. In the political world, Connie Hedegaard emphasized that collaboration involves not simply working with other policy makers but understanding that decisions are not made solely within the formal political system. To achieve anything significant, one must work with diverse stakeholders, including knowledge institutions, businesses, NGOs, and civil society. Hedegaard also noted that the complexity of decision making requires stakeholders to understand the processes if they want to make themselves heard and bring their knowledge into play. In politics, it is not enough to know "the truth"; one must also be able to compromise and identify "landing zones" (i.e., stopping points). She suggests that real collaboration that leads to progress requires a profound understanding of the counterparts' interests and accepting that one cannot have everything one's own way. Humility and compromise are prerequisites for creating progress through collaboration in the political realm.

Meg Jones touched on the foundational aspect of social contract theory in collaboration, where individuals give up some individual rights to be governed for the protection of property and themselves. She pointed out that collaboration has always been a part of human society, whether it is to defend against external threats or to work toward common goals. She expressed her belief in the UN as a platform for collaboration by highlighting its foundational purpose and its success in addressing global challenges. Established out of the rubble of World War II with the central goal of ensuring peace and security, its role expanded thereafter to include other factors that can impact peace and security, such as health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and the conservation of critical resources. She emphasized that the UN acts as a convening force for collaboration between governments in tackling issues at the international level (e.g., the Millennium Development Goals and the SDGs); member states agree to focus and concentrate resources around specific goals, (e.g., health, human rights, climate change) and involve collaborations between the private and public sectors, academia, and NGOs.

In summary, formal and informal politics are deeply intertwined with collaboration. Collaboration requires an understanding of complex decision-making processes and the ability to work with diverse stakeholders and their power relations. It also involves actively seeking compromise, shared understanding, and the recognition of mutual interests.