

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 Hi, I am Paul Verschure and together with my colleague, Ferdinand Siemens, we are speaking today with Ilona Schmiel, the Intendant of the *Tonhalle-Gesellschaft Zürich*. Welcome, Ilona. Could you begin by giving us a sense of what brought you to be in the middle of a complex collaborative process at the Tonhalle?

I. Schmiel Originally, I trained as a musician, as an opera singer, but did not succeed, so I studied to become a teacher. Unhappy with the education system in Germany and worldwide, I also studied ancient languages, Latin, Greek as well as cultural and media management. In 1993, I worked as an organizer on the staff of the *Donaueschinger Musiktag* after which I worked on the opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer. From there I went to Italy to work for the Arena de Verona productions. In 1998, I landed a major position at the concert hall in Bremen, *Die Glocke*, as the artistic and managing director. I was 30 years old at the time, the youngest artistic director in Germany. I am also a woman, so this was a surprise for everyone. After four and a half years, I took over as intendant and artistic director of the *Beethovenfest Bonn*. Over the next 11 years, I put together 10 *Beethovenfests*, until I got a very interesting offer and moved to Zurich. Since August 2014 I'm the artistic and executive director of the *Tonhalle Gesellschaft Zürich*, which runs the *Tonhalle Orchestra Zürich*. Founded in 1868, the Tonhalle Orchestra is one of the oldest orchestras in Switzerland. Today it is comprised of 104 musicians and is recognized as the top orchestra in Switzerland, the ambassador of Switzerland for great symphonic music. In addition, we also manage the concert hall.

P. Verschure That's quite a career. As you know, we are trying to understand the notion of collaboration, which can mean different things to different people. Given your experience in the artistic world, we would be curious to hear how you have experienced collaboration.

I. Schmiel For me, collaboration is finding a way to bring together the best ideas and empowering people so they can really get a sense of common objectives; trying to make sure that everything is possible, that you can have success, but that you can fail at the same time.

P. Verschure When you talk about collaboration, what do you see as its defining features?

I. Schmiel On an artistic level, it means quality. At an organizational or management level, it involves making sure that we achieve common objectives. Which way should we go, and what steps should we take to achieve that? When thinking about collaborations with people in other countries, we must define what is our mindset, what's the cultural background, and how can we come together in the sense of communication?

P. Verschure You describe different aspects to the implementation of collaboration. For instance, you mention the idea of objective. Is a common objective for you a central feature of the collaborative projects that you have experienced?

I. Schmiel The objective is the first thing which must be defined. Without this, we will end up talking past each other and will never achieve a result. From an artistic perspective, imagine that you are bringing together 104 musicians: this group has a clear structure and a clear hierarchy. They also have a clear vision because they are led by our chief conductor, Paavo Järvi, one of the top conductors at the moment. This vision is transferred to the musicians by Paavo. To interpret or translate that vision to the management team means that we must strive for the same high level of quality to reach this vision; management must find a way to reach these common objectives.

P. Verschure As you describe, an orchestra adheres to a very specific Western musical tradition and hierarchy. In some sense, this hierarchy might reduce the degrees of freedom in the collaborative process,

such that some participants no longer are active collaborators. Instead, they're executing a task. How should this be balanced to get the quality of collaboration that you want and need?

- I. Schmiel You always need to find this balance so that they have the most freedom they can get out of it. If they don't have it, if they are only executing, then you never will reach the pinnacle of quality.
- P. Verschure Yes, but in an orchestra with 104 musicians, there is an inherent structure: You want to ensure that the conductor has maximum freedom to develop a piece, even though the conductor is constrained by the composition itself and must work within that envelope. Moving down into the orchestra, the freedom that you give to the individual musicians becomes more and more controlled. How would you scale that?
- I. Schmiel That's not totally how Paavo conducts. When he's giving a concert, every musician must be very careful, very attentive, because something new happens at each performance. This is because Paavo reacts to what emanates from the orchestra. For example, when the solo oboist plays, Paavo might introduce a new tempo, a rubato; he guides the musician and the whole orchestra through that passage. It is more of an exchange in the way of collaboration and communication, which in the end empowers everyone toward that highest level.
- P. Verschure You point to an interesting tension: on one hand, there's an envelope of interaction (e.g., the composed piece), but within that envelope, there's movement that is structured according to hierarchical lines. At what point does that stop being collaboration?
- I. Schmiel In the end, there's a clear bar, a clear timing, and a clear finale after which things definitely stop. In between there are certain no-goes, defined during the rehearsal process to clarify how a piece will be interpreted. The end results emerge during the concert. This musical process is completely different to what happens on the management team.
- P. Verschure What you are sketching out here is a transition from a very deliberate and conscious process to a more habitual collective process. Initially there's a conscious searching for how the pieces might fit together, where the pieces are the different actors in that context. Through rehearsals, that which was initially deliberate then becomes more habitual to enable the performance. There's a transition point from deliberation to habit execution. How do you value this in the collaborative process? When is this collaboration or execution? Do orchestra members always collaborate with the conductor to deliver the piece?
- I. Schmiel For me it is the latter: they act together, they collaborate all the time, but they offer different qualities and different musical ideas during different parts of the rehearsal process. For me, the mark of a great conductor is to be able to work with those different musical ideas. If a conductor just does his/her own thing, then s/he will never be able to respond and react. This is one of the secrets of achieving the highest level of quality, when fantastic moments happen that are unique, that have previously never been experienced. This only happens when you have a very, very strong collaborative idea, a very strong collaboration working process. Then during the concert, there's a certain freedom, a certain release.
- P. Verschure In a sense, the notion of aesthetic quality is linked to the collaborative aspect of the performance, which gives it a quality of being creative and spontaneous. Yet perhaps this can only be detected by experts. Perhaps if I listen to a performance for the first time, I might not be able to pick up on these subtle variations.
- I. Schmiel I don't agree. In a performance, if there is something that has a huge impact and which is unique, I'm absolutely certain that even a person who has never attended a concert would recognize that something very special just happened. They might lack the vocabulary to describe it, but in live concerts, magic moments often happen. Unfortunately, this does not happen in a streaming concert, podcast, download, etc. Such technical devices help us listen to music, but only a live concert can convey the special collaboration between a conductor and an orchestra.
- P. Verschure In terms of a performance, many different characters and personalities are involved, and they must be managed carefully to enable them to play their part properly. How does this happen?

Earlier, when I mentioned the hierarchy of the Western musical tradition, you made it very clear that this is not the full picture. But that structure must be kept together; 100 or more people must be able to collectively produce a piece. How does one manage the actors in that system?

- I. Schmiel First, each musician has achieved a very high level of proficiency, through an extensive and lengthy education that is rigorous and demanding. Second, an orchestral musician must play an audition, and during this audition, a musician must demonstrate their musical abilities and instrumental skills. They are not allowed to converse with the audition committee. (This is something that I would like to see changed in the future, as it's so important to get an idea of what type of person, what kind of personality will be entering the orchestra.) During the first round, the musician plays behind a curtain: the musician has no idea who is listening to the audition, and the audition committee has no idea who is playing. The music must speak for itself. At every audition, musicians come prepared to play preset passages (specified by the audition committee) from the orchestral repertoire (e.g., long solo passages, short technical passages). Musicians are then asked to play certain passages on the spot. Within ca. 3-5 minutes, the musician must demonstrate musical prowess; they must transmit all their passion, energy, skill, etc. to the committee during this very short period in order to advance to the second or the third round. If chosen, only then do they get the possibility to perform with the orchestra. Every new musician has a probationary year. During that year, the musician is evaluated by the individual sections (e.g., violin, bass, brass) as well as the whole orchestra, which ultimately votes to accept this person as a member of the orchestra. Once this person is voted into the orchestra, they are a member for life. This is both an interesting and a hard process. It's a very European process, and whether this changes in the future may need to be looked at. But to return to your question: Where do you come from? What have you learned before? Where are your roots? What's your language? Very often language can be an issue. It could be that musicians understand each other musically, but that they have totally different mindsets and mentalities.
- P. Verschure This sounds extremely challenging, because it means that group dynamics could strongly bias the future evolution of an orchestra, and not necessarily in a direction that an artistic leader might want. Is it wise to let a group decide? Does it always lead to good outcomes? As you mentioned, you might have to reconsider it. From a broader perspective, not just for the Tonhalle, is this process healthy and effective? Might it lead to a conformity, to a groupthink, which might not be good on the long term for the artistic environment?
- I. Schmiel We are talking about the highest quality, about a special orchestra sound. Over time and months of rehearsals, the group will be able to judge whether the sound and personality of a new member fits into the group.
- P. Verschure Have you seen this go off the rails? For instance, perhaps the artistic leader had a vision on how the orchestra should develop but the group collectively and implicitly moved in a different direction – one that was almost unstoppable.
- I. Schmiel In high-caliber orchestras, this does not happen very often, but in orchestras in the middle section of quality and positioning, it frequently does. Then a group is able to create their own quality, and this does not always match with the artistic leaders' visions.
- P. Verschure In your experience, what have been the most dramatic failures of that model of collaboration? Can a whole, let's say high-level orchestra, actually fall apart?
- I. Schmiel Currently, the greatest challenge is to find leaders for open positions (e.g., a section leader). Among the top orchestras around the world, there may be 10 or 15 of these top positions free and only a few who are able to assume that position. It is difficult to identify the right candidate—a person with a strong character who will guide, influence, and impact not only the specific orchestral group but the entire orchestra as well. Will the group let in such a strong figure? We must be very careful. I cannot decide this process because as artistic and executive director, I am only partially involved: sometimes I need to mediate when things go totally wrong. But I do not elect new musicians. I can, of course, confer with the group or with the chief conductor. Paavo

and I, in turn, can consult with a group to help them find the right quality or help them accept a strong character, so that they find really an ideal candidate.

P. Verschure So, in your area, there are no classic stories or anecdotes like "Orchestra X in 1950" collapsed because they went off the rails...

I. Schmiel No.

P. Verschure Ok. All these groups evolve and each member in a group also experiences a personal trajectory of growth. Certainly, this can also lead to conflicts. How does one manage these aspects of growth in this complex environment of an orchestra, to ensure that the overall direction being taken matches the leadership of their artistic director?

I. Schmiel The main part is that the collaboration works very well with the artistic director, with the chief conductor, like Paavo. Still, you need to give every member in the orchestra the possibility to showcase their own musical quality. We do that, e.g., with chamber music: the musicians have their own series where they can curate and invent programs, where they can enhance their own visibility. We give them a space and the possibility to be part of greater vision for the concert hall.

P. Verschure That helps you acknowledge that every individual has sort of a space for exploration that does not necessarily fit into the envelope of the larger collective. Do you provide another channel for this that is smaller, more intimate? Perhaps by saying, "go explore, find new boundaries embedded within the broader picture." Is this the kind of balance that you're trying to strike?

I. Schmiel Yes.

P. Verschure Of course, we should never forget that for complex organizations like the Tonhalle, a whole structure (infrastructure, management) underpins the performers and orchestra. Does that operate on similar principles, or is a different kind of managerial model used?

I. Schmiel I would say it's a different kind of a managerial model. In the management team, we couldn't only work like, "Here's the guidance now let's go for it." I would say in the morning, every morning, "Come on, today we are doing that, and the result at the end of the day should be that." It's a different model, definitely, because we are not on stage. But we need to be productive, very creative on the same high level. So, for example, at the moment as we deal with COVID-19, we in the management organization have learned how to enrich and raise flexibility. Normally we have planned, let's say, years in advance, months in advance. Now we are planning very short term. Today, e.g., we are announcing activities in May 2021 [i.e., this month]. And we are doing that with an orchestra, with this huge ensemble, which is also used to getting an idea of future concerts well in advance, so that they can prepare. This is the same issue for the management team. At the moment, my main goal is to motivate and empower people in management to think constructively—to take risks so that we manage to have a concert on stage. Often, organization cannot happen at the most perfect or highest level, because then we would fail completely.

P. Verschure In some sense, what you're saying is that quality standards have shifted. That you now have to work with a much shorter time constant toward things that are good enough. But does that imply that maybe the pre-COVID idea of quality was more a dream than a reality? Are you now closer to a reality of quality? Or do you see going back to this pre-COVID model of quality?

I. Schmiel I would say that the outcome on stage will be the same. But the way the management organization reaches these goals is totally different. I don't believe that there is a pre-COVID time. We are working with a new model: we have to now find ways to collaborate with our departments (e.g., in the technical department, in IT, in artistic development, the orchestra, marketing, communications). Because of COVID, everything was questioned and has changed. What we are doing now is to set up the organization from bottom to top in a completely other way.

P. Verschure Earlier you mentioned the importance of common objectives. Are you currently restructuring around different objectives, or are you communicating the same objectives in a different way?

- I. Schmiel The orchestra, the management team, and Paavo Järvi have one common objective: we want to be recognized as one of the five top world class orchestras. This is a totally common objective where we all agree upon. But the ways to approach this goal during COVID is different at the moment. For the management organization, we have to invest in branding. We have to invest in finding our audiences. We have to enhance visibility in the organization, in the institution. We have to act and be very careful, what's live, what is online, what are all these digital devices in the future and how we use them. We have to control and find a balance for our processes in our daily work. We have to implement new forces. We have to implement new tools. And this changes a lot in our organization because normally we are only concerned on live performances, of organizing things which we knew before, with a certain flexibility. To meet the this completely new challenge that we have to deal with all the questions we had before: Where are the new audiences? Where are the future audiences? What are we really working for? Where's our relevance? But there are also additional political/societal issues, current values and how society is changing. We need answers to these bigger trends and questions. This is a process and every department in our organization is working within small teams to find answers. By bringing these answers together, we are developing the strategy, how we reach this goal.
- P. Verschure You say that you want to be among the five best orchestras in the world. How do you define "best" in that sense?
- I. Schmiel Highest quality, highest media, click rates, best reviews, invitations to the most prestigious international festivals in the world, and, of course, being a hot spot in Zürich—a place where everyone who visits or lives in Zürich wants to be. Where people know that they have to be very quick to get a ticket (like the Berlin Philharmonic or Vienna Philharmonic).
- P. Verschure You have mentioned two orchestras. Who are the other two on your list?
- I. Schmiel This is my secret...
- P. Verschure If you now set the goals in these performance terms, that are very operational, in some sense that goal setting now must be communicated to the other players and management structures of the organization. How do you transmit that goal? I would imagine that to someone who, e.g., is building up the stage, the idea of being number five in the world might not mean as much. How do you translate goal setting throughout the entire organizational structure?
- I. Schmiel Well, we have a very high quality of standards, working standards. And if you're talking about, for example, the orchestra technicians, then I must really say that I'm proud of that group: they are people who always want to optimize situations, who want to be ahead of new developments. Currently we are now moving out of our interim hall, Tonhalle Maag, back to Tonhalle at the lake, and these technicians are very much engaged, eager to find the best quality, going back into a concert hall of 1895, but with a standard of the 21st century. They feel this huge responsibility that there is a spotlight on their department. To me the question is whether people have the right position, and if the group is working at the highest level. The secret lies in the culture of the institutions: On the management team, six nations are represented; people come from totally different angles, with different experiences, and if they match despite their differences, then we will employ the best models and the best outcome to solve the problems.
- P. Verschure What's interesting in the development that you're sketching is that there are basically two processes running in parallel to collaborative processes: You have the core assets of the organization, the orchestra, and everything around that, which runs on a more artistic course. And now you also say, as the Tonhalle, as an organization, we want to compete in the world and thus we pursue another set of goals which are supposed to be complementary in some way. But at different points in time, these goals could collide or be unavoidable. For instance, you might really want to hold an event because it will improve visibility, but this may add to the orchestra's workload so there's no way we can make it work. How do you manage the conflict or potential conflict between these two streams of collaborative processes?

- I. Schmiel You have to be very careful that you even realize that there are conflicts between these two streams. Such conflicts do happen and, as the artistic and executive leader, you must guide that process: you have to make sure that the core process and the core repertoire is always seen best in the quality and is going to happen in the best way it can be. On the management team, you have much more flexibility. You have to find a way how to deal with these challenges, which are coming up right now. Again, this means that you have to find a way to make sure that your teams, your subteams, are thinking in problem-solving structures and finding right answers. Of course, there is sometimes an overlap and there is sometimes a conflict that must be dealt with. Sometimes you have to redefine your cultural values, especially when it's chaotic, like it is right now, or where you feel that people are offended in a way. At the moment, the emotional part of working on the management team is really a challenge for every leader in that culture business. On the other hand, if you have this clear goal and if you get the results from the stage, then you can always reassess later. You can go a little bit more to the left, 20 percent more to another angle; you have to deal with that flexibly; when you fail, you have to find the best way forward. This is the most important part of communication nowadays. Communication, using digital devices and finding really a way that when, on the other hand, the cultural and musical qualities are as high as we have spoken about, that you have on the same level the digital qualities and all these devices. This is the most important thing at the moment: trying to bring things on a high level, at the same high level.
- P. Verschure You spoke about the emotional challenges being faced in the organization. What are you referring to? Is this fear about the future or personal health concerns? Is it where the orchestra is going within the artistic world? What are the emotional challenges?
- I. Schmiel More about where are we going with the artistic world.
- P. Verschure Where are you going with Tonhalle in the artistic world? What is that world in which you see yourself operate, say on mid- and long-term scales?
- I. Schmiel In our music business, the world is both totally globalized and becoming increasingly local. What we have learned through the last months is that we have to concentrate first on local issues. We have to deal with all the qualities, with all the challenges; we have to reach people here in Zürich and the surroundings to become a fan of the orchestra; to use us, really use us. We have to find and redefine the place in a certain way because we are now moving back into the city center of Zürich. As I mentioned, currently we are moving back to an area of Zürich where we have been before, but over the last four years, we were located in a totally other part in Zürich, in Zürich West, which is totally different from the lake area. In those four years, we succeeded in establishing ourselves as part of that community and attracted new people. Now we have to find a way of bringing these new concertgoers, who are not normally part of the lakeside area, into the wonderfully renovated historic Tonhalle—to help them identify with it and make them feel that it's their place. This is our top local priority at the moment.
- Then there is a "generation transfer" or shift on concert attendance. For years, people purchased a subscription, say, to attend a concert every Wednesday for 10 months at eight o'clock. I don't believe that this system is very effective anymore. New models are needed if you want to reach younger or new generations of concert goers. This is totally clear for me and the leading team. But change can cause insecurity in people working in other departments. For example, when politicians say that it's much more important to open up a ski area in Davos, our workers may feel pressure. So I always say, a bit ironically: we need to find out how to transfer the value of a ski area into our concert world, so that we reach the highest point of recognition. This was something that really shocked them; they have seen so many other business areas that are ranked as number one or number two, and we are maybe number 10. The whole of society—what it values and how it copes with change—faces transformation. And although we, at the Tonhalle, may change how our work is conducted, the societal value of this work, of culture, must be protected, because culture not only imparts identity to a society, it feeds society's soul.

- P. Verschure This is an important point. You have expressed the sense of responsibility to society, but again, society is a very complex structure. In there, you collaborate with different societal entities and organizations, from your sponsors (which might be big organizations in themselves) or the banks in Bahnhofstrasse or politicians who have to support you in difficult times. So that's another form of collaboration in which you must work—a very complex one. How do you manage that? How do you bring these different factions together? I could imagine that some of your big sponsors might have a very different view on society than the members of society you are trying to reach, say from Zurich West. How do you bridge that from the perspective of collaboration?
- I. Schmiel First of all, I believe that music is the most passionate art form; there is something in music that speaks to people, even those who normally do not engage in other art forms. This is the first thing I discovered in my life. And if you are, yourself, so passionate, if you have been on stage, you know exactly what it means and can transfer this to other people, e.g., the CEO of a bank, who is also on stage. Maybe he is not particularly interested in music, but he's been on stage; he can recognize the challenges. By combining these disparate worlds and explaining what it's like to be a musician, you can gain access to the CEO. What we try to avoid is to have a situation where a sponsor stipulates that you have to engage a particular artist to play a particular piece, otherwise the sponsor won't give his support. Personally, I have never had this experience. I see my role similar to a GPS system: I try to navigate a sponsor to a certain point where he never been before, where he sees that his support could reach other people, with people inviting other people. Sponsors today feel a huge responsibility for the society, in terms of giving their employees something back, being part of a cultural world, enabling access to very individual experiences—experiences where people can grow, experiences for their soul.
- P. Verschure I don't know if I'm convinced by that answer, because in some sense you're saying, well, all these tensions and confusions can be sort of covered up by the beauty and the magic of music. I would like to believe and agree with you, but the real world is sometimes more complex. If we talk about common goals, a sponsor might want to be associated with the Tonhalle because it achieves a goal for them. They might, e.g., feel that it elevates their visibility or status in the world. That might not be necessarily consistent with your objective of how you want to define the Tonhalle.
- I. Schmiel It's quite easy: if it doesn't match, the person or the entity won't be our sponsor. If we don't find a path toward real partnership, then it's not necessary to talk. We look for people who want to be convinced at the end, who want to make new experiences. And if they want to make new experiences and if we have a good communication about that, these common objectives forge way in partnership. If it doesn't match at all, then we stop and try to find someone else. This is really a people business, and if I don't have a very good talk with, why should we work together?
- P. Verschure Well, sometimes you might need it to close your budget.
- I. Schmiel Rest assured, I will find a way. We can afford the money and can convince the people because you need people who are cultured in a certain way. They don't need to have any idea of what we are doing, they just need to have a special cultural interest. If they don't have that, they will support something else. There's so many things to support in our world.
- P. Verschure I would like to return to an interesting point that you raised earlier: for corporate sponsors, a prime objective to give something back to their employees in terms of building a culturally rich environment. Is this the primary motivation that you see or would like to see there?
- I. Schmiel It is also because the education in schools and universities is so different. If we find sponsors who are interested in what we are doing, they feel a responsibility to enrich the knowledge of these people and the experiences. It's much more than just going to a concert.
- P. Verschure Ok, that's a very ideological outlook, which I really appreciate. It's extremely interesting. We've looked at different components of collaboration around the Tonhalle, and it's a complex structure. In your experience, looking at these different processes which have to work in parallel, what are the factors that cause things to break down?

- I. Schmiel If we lose the understanding for each other, then it's getting complicated.
- P. Verschure So, it's very much about communication, goal setting, and insisting on that communication.
- I. Schmiel Yes. Insisting that one's own attitudes are not relevant to reach a goal and not trying to find a good consensus. These are the factors that are not helpful.
- P. Verschure Ok, a consensus is also still something that you think should always be our objective in that context, as opposed to imposing, let's say, a view.
- I. Schmiel I would say in Switzerland consensus is one of the main goals. If you don't understand this aspect of Swiss culture, you will fail. If you're clever, you can guide through this consensus culture as you search for a way to that goal. You have to bring everyone into that boat; you don't struggle when the first goes away.
- P. Verschure From your perspective in the area where you're active, where you try to build and maintain this complex collaborative process, what issues are critical challenges that you now face?
- I. Schmiel Critical is when you have to deal with so many different mindsets, when you have to balance different expectations, when you feel there is a lack of communication (e.g., when everything is being done in home offices or via Zoom). It's much more complicated to get a feel for employees, for the musicians. Remote work breaks down communication, which means you have to communicate clearer, better, even more polite than before, because you won't get the time to explain everything in person. Critically, you have to be very, very clear about cultural values.
- P. Verschure You also indicated important challenges for your organization: What's the future going to look like? How are we going to interact in the world? Do these considerations generalize well to that future perspective?
- I. Schmiel I think these topics are relevant for the whole of society. If we don't reach that after COVID-19, or through the next pandemic situation, we are lost. What we have experienced now is that everything, every decision over the last months, has economic implications. The most important thing has been: How will the economy be impacted? And what impact does this have on society? Therefore, our position will get much stronger in the future, I would say. We have to find a way to communicate better, to show our relevance, and really to offer and giving access to everyone. If we take this very seriously, we have so many tasks to do.
- P. Verschure This is interesting because what you bring up now is that you see yourself, in some sense, as representing the human aspect of our society and of our existence, and to ensure that it's protected and advanced in parallel to the economic considerations. That, of course, places you in a playing field with very different kinds of actors, who all represent the human condition in some sense. Do you feel that you are growing more into networks that deal with global considerations about the human condition, or do you still believe it will be this sort of this, the more narrow laser of the artistic world and music?
- I. Schmiel The artistic world of music needs a very specialized focus. On the other hand, we need to open up and get on top of the themes and trends in our society. I have to balance, in a way, how we can deal with both of these sides, and COVID-19 definitely helps to bring us back on a topic if we are dealing with that for the future and having much more relevance.
- P. Verschure We already spoke a bit about but COVID and for you it has been a very important test case. Given your experiences over the last one and a half years, do you believe that humans and humanity will be able to really develop sustainable collaboration that serves many of the goals you just mentioned—not just the economic ones but the ones of being human. Do you think we are able to sustain constructive collaboration?
- I. Schmiel I think we are born for that, yes.
- P. Verschure Ok, but if I would give you a magic wand, so that you could change one thing about the way in which humans operate in this collaborative context, what would you change?

- I. Schmiel Give us enough money to be independent and that we can change in our organization, at first, everything to the highest quality, and then we are giving back everything also to the sponsors.
- P. Verschure Ok, very good. Well, Ilona, thank you very much for this conversation and your insight. It was fantastic.