



Knowledge Retention Interview

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Finbarr Curran

Key words

Finance, budget, IT, emergencies, Pakistan, planning, accountability, knowledge management, Dubai, logistics-hub, FITTEST, leadership, bureaucracy, funding, community.

Summary

Finbarr Curran's interview highlights his extensive career with WFP, which he joined in 1996. Initially brought in to help implement an ERP system, his role expanded significantly over the years. He became the Director of IT, transforming the department from a technical unit to a business partner. Curran also played a key role in setting up a logistics hub in Dubai, which provided telecoms expertise and other services to various UN agencies.

Curran emphasizes the importance of planning, leadership, and accountability in achieving success. He believes in listening to and partnering with colleagues, sharing credit, and maintaining a clear vision. He also stresses the need for cultural shifts within WFP to improve internal controls and accountability.

He advocates for knowledge management, seeing it as crucial for efficiency and effectiveness. Curran's leadership style is characterized by humility, collaboration, and a focus on adding value to humanitarian efforts. His insights reflect a deep commitment to improving WFP's operations and impact on global food security.

Full transcript

It would be great to learn a bit more about your career progression in the WFP, the roles you've been through over the years. And it'll be nice to also have a number of how many years you've been with WFP.

Oh my God, I, I joined WFP in October 1996 before you were born, right? And I have been working prior to that in IFAD, which is a sister agency, and I joined WFP because they had, decided they were beginning to grow. It was a small organisation. It was about a billion dollars a year at that stage. And they recognised that the kind of manner in which they kept human resource records and financial records and did their procurement kind of lacked internal controls, to put it nicely. And so they decided to go it into the market and look for what was then called ERPs, enterprise risk resource. And I was brought in to help them do the search.

Originally it was a three-month contract in and that grew when we had selected the pack, which was SAP, they asked me to say on to implement the finance and budget aspect of SAP. The big driver at the time was what was known as the Y2K problem. Again, you're probably too young to remember, this is computer systems had been so primitive they'd only kept two digits for the year. So you know, 1980 would be 80, 1990 was 90. And there was this fear right across the world that when the year changed to 2000, the year would be

00 and it would cause the end of the world. There were people in WFP, sensible people, who had brought in food and water in case the world ceased to function. I know it, it sounds ridiculous now, but in those days, that's the way it was. And so there was this urgency to transform, particularly the financial records. And my background is finance and IT. And so we implemented that despite many challenges. And then at the same time, there was another individual doing the HR and payroll system, but I think he was day trading instead of actually doing the job. So they asked me to stay on an extra year to do that. And after we had implemented the payroll and the HR functionality, the then director of IT left and they asked me to move in to that role. So I was very lucky. I hit all the right places at the right time.

And so I spent four years as the director of IT here, recognising that it was a much smaller organisation and what we had to do in IT at that stage. And we had with a lot of knowledgeable, clever people. But we had to move from being just the kind of office that fixed your printer when it wasn't working to running, managing, and maintaining an ERP system. So we developed what we call business associates. Their role was to go out and talk to the business community, understand what the business was looking for and then come back and translate that into like technical requirements, if you want to put it that way, right? And we recognise that we didn't have sufficient resourcing to be able to fund the different types of technical people that you would need. So what we decided was we would get those, let's call them translators. They would translate from business requirement into technical requirements. And they would have enough technical knowledge to make sure a third party could develop or maintain whatever. But it moved IT from being perceived as just a kind of a technical unit into being a business partner.

And then as you know, in WFP, we all have to move every four or six years. And we had just started to develop an office in Dubai, which provided telecoms expertise. In those days, telecoms was very different to what it is now. There was a lot of mechanical stuff in the background, if you want to put it that way, as opposed to just digital. I mean, digital was emerging, but it hadn't established itself. And so the guy who had set up the office in Dubai, Peter Cassier, he was moving on and I went out there to turn it into what we essentially called a non-food logistics hub. And there we provided telecoms expertise not just to WFP, but we also sold it and financed ourselves to other agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP. It was a great team. For example, they were the first team to go in after the Americans in Afghanistan. And this is in 2002, 2003 to set up the UN telecommunications for all the work that the UN was going to do. We also established and please remove the conversation –

Is this related to the emergency telecommunications cluster?

Yes, Yeah. Well, yes, we established a group there which was called FITTEST, Fast IT intervention services. But because of its expertise, the UN was developing an emergency

cluster and the Dubai office had the person there who, essentially the only other organisation that had the same kind of capability was actually the Secretariat. But they're limited to where they could go by virtue of the fact that they have to have a mandate from the General Assembly to go. Whereas we had country agreements with pretty much everywhere. And in fact, the Secretariat often asked us to go in and start developing when they knew they were going to go into a new country, but they actually haven't got the mandate. And so it was very lucrative. And we were able to run that Dubai hub with no budget because we were able to recover from the services that we sold to one of the other services we did, which was quite innovative. And I'm not claiming the brains behind this. I just claim to have the ability to see good ideas and to exploit them. We developed the vehicle leasing, which now is not considered a big deal. But in those days, it was a huge deal because America as a donor refused to buy vehicles, but they would pay leasing fees. So we developed this idea where the Dubai office owned the vehicles and then we leased them to country offices and we provided a full service services, insurance, the whole, the whole 9 yards. And then we will start to be able to do that for other agencies as well.

I think I'd love to come back to this lease, but let me just go back a bit to the implementation of this ERP, SAP. Is that not what we call WINGS?

Correct.

OK, that's WINGS. So, well, it seems to have been definitely successful and what is working now and deploying new technology can always be challenging and it may work well or not work well. So how do you think you were able to make it work? Probably there were some challenges, but what was the process? How did it go?

I think in general, the way you make things happen is to bring people in and partner. And I think key is as a leader, people think that they have to have all the ideas and they have to know the best way of moving forward. But a leader doesn't have to be that, doesn't have to be the smartest person in the room at all. They have to listen and they have to distil and they have to make sure everybody feels that they've at least been listened to, right. I mean, everybody understands that not every idea can flourish. But if you feel a person has listened to your idea, that it's been considered and that for whatever reason it's not going to be acted about, I think that's an important thing. I think sharing credit is vitally important. So people feel that what they do is going to be recognised. And well, I should have stepped back a little bit.

Some of the previous generation used to say I was the first bureaucrat they brought into WFP because I'm a huge believer in planning and I emphasise planning as opposed to plans. And this is one of one of the quotes that I'm associated with here is Eisenhower, who said plans are useless, but planning is indispensable, right. And so I've always encouraged colleagues to have a vision of where they want to go and to have a practical plan of how to

get there, but not to worry when something unexpected happens because something unexpected always happens. Once you have your baseline plan, you can adjust. It's a bit like if you're going from here (Rome) to, I don't know, Florence, and you plan to take the motorway and you've looked at the map and all the rest, and then the motorway is blocked. You know that there are other routes because you've planned and so you take the other route. And so I think that's a key factor in delivering on things. Also, one of the big things is the influencer right, there are people in any community and, work is no exception, who can influence people even if they don't have a position of authority. And it's important to have those people on board as early as possible. It's also important to have the staff associations on board when you're doing these kind of initiatives because of course, ultimately you're depending on the staff to do this. And if there are some concerns they have, you at least can say, I listened, we weren't able to do anything about it. But more often than not, you can do something about it. Maybe not 100%, but you can do something about it. It's about trusting people. Most people want to do a good job. Most people want to feel that they have achieved, that they have contributed. And in a way it's kind of exploiting that to say, yeah, OK, well if we can do it this way, then it'll all come to an end.

And that's not to say that the implementation of WINGS was the most perfect thing that ever happened. No, far from it. Of course, there was all sorts of disruptions. But I think the shared vision, the shared plan, the shared understanding that when things go wrong, nobody's going to point a finger if it's done for all the best reasons, which normally mistakes will happen. And that sense of the shared vision is what gets people in to, you know, work unreasonable hours. For example, I know one of the people you interviewed was Amir Abdulla. I remember one of the weekends that we really had to work pretty much 16 hours a day that he made some Egyptian food for us and brought it in. And that kind of thing, it sounds incidental, but it creates a sense of team, it creates a sense of community. And so that's how I think you, you deliver on things. You have to have that openness. It's not about you. It's about how the whole community is going to function, how the whole community is going to achieve.

Yeah. And, and clearly you do look at things from a leadership perspective and really inspiring people. And not just about the, the technical side of things, but some of what you've done is also very technical, working with very technical people like this logistics hub in Dubai. It would be nice to understand how, you know, the process for setting that up. Also, you were able to put that together as well and, as building on what you had done with WINGS and with any experiences there.

Yeah, I think that the one thing that I could say, I mean, one's always conscious of sounding like you've got all the answers when you don't. But one of the things is to kind of leverage ideas from other people. And we had spotted, when I say we, everybody in the organisation had spotted, for example, we didn't have a place where we could store things. So the

humanitarian response depots were developed. The guy who had established the Dubai hub, he had understood that we needed that kind of a hub. And he had, he had used the fact that he was a ham radio enthusiast. And so was the, the, the Prime Minister of UAE and that's how he managed to negotiate the hub. And so it's, it's about seeing opportunities, pulling those opportunities together. And so, yeah, it technical is an interesting way of putting it. It's about seeing the, the business gap. And one of the things I would suggest to colleagues in general is to see what is the business value you're adding, right? So even if you're deep in an enterprise resource planning tool or whatever it's called, it's not about the tool, it's about how that's going to enable the business. And the business here is humanitarian and it's very easy and it's happened to me and I'm sure it'll happen to me again, is that the means becomes your objective rather than the real objective, which is to deliver, to deliver value. So when we looked at the leasing, for example, we saw the value that this was going to add. I mean, it paid for itself in two years. We ended up having, you know, 400 vehicles within a year and it had all paid for itself in two years. And that was the kind of value that it was adding. And the charge to projects was much less than if they were buying vehicles. And so that left more money to be spent on food. And so that's your objective. You're always looking and saying, no matter how technical this seems, no matter how far removed it seems from the frontline, it is about adding value to that. That's what that's what it's about.

And so for example, let me pick another example. I was the director of budget for a number of years, and I had realised, prior to that I'd been the director of procurement, procurement and supply chain where two different, it was logistics and procurement, two different divisions. One of the things that I'd noticed there was that colleagues had to wait to get their money before they could order the food that was needed. And of course, that meant a huge delay because at the time, in general, from the time you identified what food you needed to the time it was distributed to the beneficiaries could be anything up to nine months. I mean, and so with the knowledge from procurement and the knowledge from budget and at the time, there was a financial crisis. We convinced the board that instead of having money in the bank, because WFP always has money in the bank, whether the, the business model works, you know, we could have money in food, so we did a survey for the sake of argument, we would say the world, you know, there was a need for 10,000 tonnes of wheat. We said, OK, let's buy 6000 tonnes, let's position it close to where it is. But we don't release it to the project until the project gets their funding. But that, that reduced a three-month time lag in, but the business objective has to be clear. What's the business objective? To get food to the beneficiaries as quickly and as cost effectively as possible. So even if you're involved on the technical side, you need to keep that focus on what actually am I doing. The means to what I'm doing is important, but it's not the end. And trying not to confuse that because you've become so obsessed, for example, in trying to get the ERP

in place that that becomes your objective, right? But that's not the business objective. The business objective is to deliver value. Yeah, sorry, I'm running.

No, not at all. I'm loving every bit of this interview and you talked about business making, connecting to the business value. And how have you managed to get management to buy into all these things you are doing? I think like you said, you have to make that case for how it really translates to value. And how have you gone about getting that support?

Well, I mean, the technical official way of doing it is to produce a business case and to say, you know, here's how we do it at the moment. And this is what it costs. And here's how it's envisioned if we could do it in the future. And here are the costs. But WFP, and this isn't a criticism, it's kind of like every organisation has a culture culturally that hasn't been part and parcel of how we've operated, right? Our culture has been, and I think it's fantastic, our culture has been no matter what, we will get the food to whoever needs it, right? What the kind of preaching I've been doing is let's look at how we do it and see can we with the same amount of money reach more people, more cost effective? And sometimes that that creates that very difficult situation. I remember when I was a young lad with a small NGO in Ethiopia, I was sitting with a very experienced logistics individual, and we were discussing about how we would reach various people distributed in impossible places in Ethiopia. And he said, oh, there's too few people in that area when we're not going to deal with them. And I remember thinking, Oh my God, we're just going to let them die. But no matter how brutal it sounds, there was an element of truth in it. If you can save two people here for one person there, don't. I mean, it's terrible to reduce it to a kind of a formula, but in truth, that's a key element. The other key element is that you have to invest in order to develop. You have to, and the key is to see how those investments can be done efficiently and you can ensure that the performance that was promised has been delivered. And we're not good at that as an organisation, we are not good at that.

So how did I, how did I? Again, it isn't Finbarr, it's Finbarr with a community. Let me pick another example. I was the country director in Pakistan and Pakistan has the second highest rate of stunting. And when you consider they have a population of over 225 million, the number of children who are at threat of stunting is high. And we got into conversation again, we there was lots of people involved in this, right? It wasn't just Finbarr, but we got in conversation with the special adviser to the Prime Minister at the time who has subsequently become the head of the Global Fund. And she was an amazing person. And this was, this was something she had worried about all her career. She was a medical doctor. And so we sat and we created that kind of synergy which we brought our value to the table, which was the distribution, the logistics and they brought their value, which was their knowledge of the local communities, the medical facilities and, we put together the single biggest stunting project in WFP. And selling that idea to the senior management was relatively easy once you had, you know, here's the partner, that's what they're doing. Come

back to the plan. Here's the plan. Here's the benefits. Here's kind of a good analysis of what's involved. Here's the risks. And that's one thing WFP has really taken on board in the last 15 years, the idea of risks and evaluating the risks. And you must do that again, coming back to Eisenhower. That's part of the planning process. What are the risks? What can we do to avoid those risks? And in general, you find that if you put forward a logical case, you're not going to win every argument. I mean, you'll be accused of being a bureaucrat, which you are, which I am, but I'm proud of being a bureaucrat because you need someone to step back from the emotion of the moment and say, hang on, there may be a better way to do this. I'm not suggesting that Finbarr comes up with a better way of doing it. I'm just saying, you know, let me talk to other people, see what their ideas are and see, can we do this in a better way?

No, I appreciate your humility. And these are great projects that you've really led and, and you were on the point of keeping it going as, as you, once you start where we get the buy in, we start the project and you were talking about kind of investing and investing and making sure we can keep it going and delivering on the performance that we've promised. Could you speak a bit more about that?

Since I'm officially supposed to be retired, they asked me to stay on an extra year. So since I'm going to be retiring, really let me be a little bit critical of WFP. I mean, the work the people do is, is amazing. I remember one of my first years here, I discovered some poor guy was living in a house in North Korea that had no windows in -30° to ensure distribution of food. And I'm thinking, what an amazing commitment. But despite that amazing commitment, it is truly staggering commitment on the parts of individuals we avoid accountability, right? And there's an element of when I first came here, you could break the rules provided it was for good reason, right? And I remember I had just, when the earthquake happened in Indonesia in 2004, I think it was, I had just got some money in IT to buy licences, but I used the money to buy food, to give it to the people who are buying food. And it was that kind of thing. I mean, from a budgetary point of view, I should have been taken out and shot. But in WFP, no, you did the thing to. But at some point that becomes irresponsible, right? The rules need to be followed in order. And that's why accountability is so important. Accountability isn't about taking Finbarr out and shooting him. It's that Finbarr, you were supposed to get licences. Where are the licences? Because ultimately the licences are going to enable more people to get out of the system to plan better to right. And it's that kind of accountability. We're hopeless that because it's almost we feel like we're letting people down to point a finger and say, but to me, and I know people looking at this who are operational will say, well, there you go, there's the bureaucrat again. Accountability enables clarity of what you are supposed to be doing. And if you're going to have any kind of a plan, you need to know that the individuals involved in that plan are going to deliver when they're going to deliver or what they're going to deliver. And if it goes wrong, that's fine. There's nothing wrong with something going wrong. You

adjust. But if you have that plan and you have that accountability and there's some kind of performance metric, you know, how to adjust, again, like going to Florence, you know, if you have to take a different road, you look and say, well, it's going to be an extra 50 kilometres, do I have enough petrol? This is the way life is, right?

And I remember sitting down with a really outstanding logistician and we were talking about plans, and he said, Finbarr, you don't understand, we're too busy, we don't have time to make plans. But really what he meant was the plan is in my head, right? That's really what he meant was right. And I said, yes, I know you, you know what you're doing, but does the other person over there know what you were doing? And This is why planning together, putting it on paper may seem like a burden, but it's not. It's ensuring clarity, and accountability ensures clarity. It isn't about, you know, trying to punish people, it's about clarity. And WFP is hopeless at this were absolutely hopeless.

One of the first things I think you mentioned was internal controls. And so while you've raised this key issue, this gap, this thing about really having accountability and WFP is a big, big organisation, different things happening, how would you, what if you had to make changes or some key things that will really strengthen our internal controls? Are there any things you do or will it be more of a culture shift or others?

Well, any big shift is a cultural shift. And it, it's always very difficult to achieve cultural shifts, not because people are up to that are awkward. It's just, we're so used to doing things. I tell a quick story, I'm a certified project manager and I was on the course, the guy opened the course by saying, he said, you know, when I got married and my wife did the roast beef, he said when she took it out of the oven, it had two slices of the roast beef on top. And he asked her why is that? And she said, that's the way you cook roast beef. So I'll make it short. He goes to the mother-in-law and sure enough the two slices, eventually he goes to the grandmother-in-law, and when he says why are the two slices on top, she says, oh, that's funny, she said, when I first got married, the oven was very small. So I used to cut two pieces off the ends and put them on top so that it fit in the oven. The point being that often the practise you have originated for reasons that are no longer relevant and that's why you and that's what culture is, right? Somebody said, this is the way you cook roast beef and you're saying no, it was valid at one point, but there's a better way to do it. And that's – I'm losing your question. Remind me of the question.

No. Yeah, I think you're right on point. I was asking about what kind of internal control things would you put in place. But you've really talked about the fact that culture is a big part of it. Would there be other things you would do?

Yes, there are. I would change our job descriptions to be more accountability oriented, right? I think one of the big confusions in WFP is that we have task-oriented job descriptions, and with tasks, you could have six different job descriptions with the same

task. And how do you know who's responsible, who's accountable, right? And you know that the racy model where you've got responsibility, accountability, the accountability is singular. And that's the importance of accountability. It's singular. And again, I really emphasise it is not about, I don't believe in punishment, right? I don't, I've never punished my children. I think most people want to be responsible. The RAF, I don't know whether they still do it, but ten years ago the Royal Air Force in England, and far be it from an Irishman to praise the English, but they had a culture of celebrating major mistakes, right? And people used to compete to show that they had made the worst mistake. The idea was the more people were aware of the mistakes that could be made, the less chance there was that they'd make those mistakes. And when you're dealing with jet aircraft that cost billions of dollars, this is an important element, right? And so not only do you have to change the job descriptions to include accountability, but you have to create that culture, which you put up your hand and say, you know, I was accountable for that. It went wrong for the following reasons. We factored that into our next plan, and it's not going to happen again. There are huge benefits from that. I mean, the benefits are just enormous. And that's what I brought my kids up to say if something went wrong, tell me, we'll deal with it, right. If you were tired, you were hungry or something, that's life. That's, that's the reality of life. Very few people are intentionally bad. Yes, I would, I would change that.

You see, it's, it's a whole integrated thing. I'm sorry if I'm going to lose people on this, but you must have a strategy. Your strategy is based on what your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are. But most importantly, it's saying out of those, here's where we're going to position ourselves and here's where we're going to focus. Then you develop your plans from that, and your plans then assign accountabilities. Here's the task. Here's the person who's responsible for that task. The job descriptions reflect that. And then at some point you come back, and you say, well, how did it all go and what did we learn from the bits that went wrong? And what did we learn from the bits that went right? And how do we feed that all back initially into the plans so that ultimately it goes back into the next strategy. So we know how to position ourselves and you can't achieve that if you've a piece missing, right. And again, that's what WFP culturally hasn't acknowledged to itself. And don't get me wrong, there's top notch people and I'm not criticising the individuals, it's the culture and there's a kind of a fear of accountability. I'm going to be in trouble. But that's not it, no, quite the opposite. We're going to say, hey, great, thanks for letting us know these things go wrong because we're going to factor that back into the plan and assume that right. So achieving a cultural change takes a lot more time.

The reason they asked me to stay on was they had this Human Capital Management system which had been hanging in the background, spending a lot of money. The team over there are, I keep saying over there, because it's the other building, the team is amazing. I mean, their commitment, their knowledge is just amazing. But they were in a limbo because nobody was responsible or accountable for its delivery. And it isn't like

Finbarr brought some wonderful ideas there. He didn't, Finbarr brought the knowledge of the organisation, the knowledge of the decision makers and connected the two. Right. And so the point I'm trying to make is that it wasn't that there was anything wrong with the system. It wasn't that there was anything wrong with the with the team, far from it, the exceptional team. It was that the whole thing hasn't been linked. And this is, we get back to the business cycle, the business processes. They have to be linked. You can't delink them. You can't have a gap because that's, you know, like any chain is as strong as its weakest link. And WFP hasn't really taken that into its soul. That we need to be precise.

When I first came here, it was almost like, you know what? We have to do a budget. OK, let's do the budget. We do the budget. Tick the box, it's done. Let's get on with the real business. And one of the things I'd like to brag about is when I was Director of Budget for the last two years, we got the whole budget discussion through the board in less than an hour. How did we achieve that? We achieved that by sitting down at the very beginning of the budget process with the board members and saying, tell us what you're thinking, right? And then going back to them and saying here's what we're thinking, right? And it's that kind of linking up the communication, the openness. And I was quite surprised initially because we would tell them awful things that were going on and they would help us, right? They wouldn't say, oh, you shouldn't do that or how the hell did that happen? They would say, oh, that's interesting. We have a similar problem in our government office. This is what we did with it. And so we brought together all the ideas, all the people, and we had it linked up and you have to have it linked up. But the problem with WFP, we still do a wonderful budget process, but we don't link that up with performance. And that to me, it's actually a huge, huge lacuna. It undermines donor confidence because if we said, here's our budget, here's what we delivered on that budget and here's the reason some things went wrong. You build the confidence and it's like going to the bank manager, you know, the bank manager, I need money to do this. You go back and say, well, I did a little bit of this, but that went wrong, that other than this one, they're more likely to give you money, right? Sorry, I'm rambling.

I love and I love this. And clearly you love WFP from, from what you have shared and you are just pointing out that making some of these changes will definitely make the organisation impact better. I'm thinking of an example you gave about, you know, having to make difficult decisions. And you're talking about what if you do have to make a decision between a place which has just maybe one person and place with two people. And, and I love to understand from your perspective, how you see this in terms of having to make decisions that drive overall impact as opposed to also trying to balance this with the way humanity is baked into our mission. We really want to serve, so how, how do you see that?

Well, I suppose I have thought about that a little bit. I think I've kind of cheated and, again, I compare it to how you do childcare. So there was rules in the house, right? And if I have a

value, I can pull myself back and think of the big picture, but I would turn a blind eye to, well, let's call them infractions. And that's I think what you do work wise, you're in there as the division director. You've got your vision. You think you have your plan to deliver on the vision or, or and then you see people doing things for good reason, but it's not in keeping with the plan. And over the years you learn how to judge that, right? How to kind of say, well, A, there could be value in doing that to see how it impacts my plan or B yeah, it's very hard to turn your back on that individual, even if there's two individuals over here. And so that's what I mean by cheating. I let other people make the choice to feed the one. I didn't say good or bad, but I focused myself on trying to figure out how we could feed the two, right. So it is kind of cheating. But I think first of all, you say I'm proud of WFP, I really think I'm a cynic. I think it's privilege to go to work every day in an organisation that's helping millions of people. I mean, even when you have a boss that you'd like to see beaten to death, the overriding mission of the organisation is such that your boss is irrelevant. Those kind of slings and arrows of outrageous fortune are minor compared to what you know people are suffering in the field and to be able to do that. So that's part of it.

But yes, you do. I think in anything you do in life, you have to balance what's the big picture with the demands. There's a, a very famous Australian philosopher, Peter Singer, and he asked all, he gives 1/4 of his income to charity and he writes these books about your ethical responsibility and he questions, you know, if you're in the Western world and you've got some weird disease, you know, and you put something on the internet, people will pour in millions for that. And yet those millions could be used to benefit thousands. I mean, it's one of the human things, you know, the person I know who's suffering seems a lot more relevant than the 1000 people I don't know who are suffering, right. That's the human condition. So that's what I tried the long way to answering your question, because it's an awkward question. I tried to turn a blind eye within reason. I hope that's the satisfactory.

It's a perfect answer to quite a complicated question. And, and we are getting to the end of the interview. You've actually called yourself a bureaucrat. But then when we look at what you've talked about, you've been quite innovative. So I'll have to understand your take on innovation and how you approach it while still being very connected to systems and having things function in order.

Well, I probably diverge a little bit from the – and I can do that because I'm retiring – executive management perspective on an innovation. I don't think innovation is an objective in and of itself. I think that you look at how the business process get back to works. When I say you look to see how it can be improved, I'm talking about having a team of people, to me the collective is always more effective than the individual. So if you were to ask me what's the one thing I want in my office, it's a whiteboard so everyone can sit around and scheme it out. I've lost the thread again. Sorry.

No, innovation, about how it shouldn't be an objective.

And it's it shouldn't be an objective, and it's I think it's misleading to create that – probably going to be terminated after this – I don't think it should be. You asked me how can I be a bureaucrat and a person who loves innovation? But I didn't see it as innovation, right? I saw it as smart people coming up with smart ideas about how we could do things better, right? And if that required a change, I was prepared to struggle for that change. And that's my contribution. I don't know whether I was the innovator. I don't think I was, I think the people around me or the collective became innovative, but I don't believe I ever sat at the table and said, OK, let's talk about innovation. To get back to what I was saying earlier, it's mixing up the means with the ends, right? And it's an easy thing to happen. I think what we need to say is let's see how we can add more value to the, for example, reducing the PSA rate, the rate that we take from the contributions. Let's reduce that by 1/2 percent and see how we can improve our business. You know, the last 20 years, anytime you improve your business, of course you look at technology, of course you look at innovative ways of doing, but the objective isn't to be innovative, right? The objective is to add value. I don't know if that answers the question.

No, thank you so much for that. And how about knowledge management and what is your take on that?

Well, actually when I took over ICT in 2002, knowledge management was part of it. And I'll be the first to say I was so absorbed with the telecommunications and the application development that I didn't really pay a lot of attention to it, but over the years, and especially when I was in budget, I kept saying, you know, knowledge is as valuable as the dollars, but it has bounced around WFP because nobody knows what to do with it. My sense is that you have to gather it and there's so much in people's heads, right? And there's an element. Some people don't want to share what's in their head because they somehow think it gives them a competitive advantage, which I disagree with completely. But when you distil that knowledge, you need to make it accessible in a way that provides insights to the person looking at it. And it's that conversion from individual experiences and, and perceptions. How do you bundle that in a way? And, and there's I don't know them, but I'm sure there are lots of intelligent tools now available that lets us do that. But I think knowledge that's accessible, I remember sitting through one lessons learned that we did many years ago and the consultant who did it was a very smart person, 158 pages. How in God's name was somebody going to distil a lesson from 158 pages? It was very thorough, obviously. And so I think that's been the issue that WFP hasn't grappled with.

I mean, BCG, for example, they've an excellent knowledge and they have that, I first saw their knowledge management tools back in 2008, 2009, really impressive. One of the most important things that their colleagues do when they're out on business is feed knowledge back. BCG sees knowledge as important as fees, right? And that's what we need to do. We need one of the things, sorry, I'm bouncing around a little bit. One of the things that always

struck me when I sat in and I sat in on a huge number of emergencies, every time it looked like it was the first time we did it right. And can you imagine the time we lost over that? And don't get me wrong, there was very knowledgeable, very smart, very committed individuals, but we're reinventing the wheel every time. So I was, that's why I was actually kind of happy to see the request, because I'm not so sure the video captures it, and that's not the point, but the idea that we are beginning to recognise the value of knowledge. And sometimes the value of knowledge can be, it was the wrong thing to do, right? And that's very valuable. That's as valuable almost because you're not going to waste time going down a rabbit hole. So I think WFP should take it a bit more seriously. I think that they invest in it. They will save coming back to the bureaucrat with the suit. They will save lots and lots of money, not today or tomorrow, but in the future. And it'll make us a more competitive. So I'm a huge, huge fan of knowledge management as properly understood, right? So insights, intelligence, that's what you need from your knowledge management. Not just a tool to gather pieces of information, but something that allows a person to dig into it and to gain insights or intelligence from that.

Thank you so much, Finbarr. This has been a great learning experience. And I'm sure that for all the staff that will have access to this, they'll really learn a lot from it. And maybe just to give it a final word, what is there anything you would like to add just as a final word?

One of the things that struck me when I was in Pakistan was every government office I went to, they were tripping over Ivy League PhDs. So WFP has to be cautious about where it adds its value. I think it has huge value to add. And the stunting programme was an example to me where we used all the brilliance of their PhD nutritionalists. But we brought WFP's logistics and supply chain knowledge and credibility as a partner. And I don't think WFP when it's looking strategically, I don't think it's looking at this. It's not looking to say how is the world changing. And it is. There was a time when we walked in and took over. I don't think we should be doing that. I think we should be there as a partner like a BCG who brings value here and a clearly articulated value. But we need to think about that. We need to see how the direction the world is developing, the direction politics is developing and figure out where do we add value so that beneficiaries will benefit. Thank you.