



Design Lab

January 23-26, 2017

Outcomes, outputs, further questions
and next steps

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Overview of research findings

by
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See: Lokhorst, A.M., Pyres, J., Russ, C., Tennyson, R., *Current Status of Remote Partnering*

The team's starting point(s)



- The team's individual reasons for being interested:
 - *'Learning how humanity can shine through technology'*
 - *'It's a topic where science meets practice'*
 - *'Liberating our introverted partnership brokers'*
 - *'Finding out what are we missing out on'*
- Working remotely (UK, Netherlands, India) – only one person in the team had met everyone prior to the project
- A shared curiosity about whether remote partnering was always seen as 'second best' or could be a preferred option – and, if so, when and why
- An assumption that working remotely was fundamentally different than working face-to-face
- Surprise that this did not seem to be a well-researched topic.

Coming up with a working definition

- No formal definition was found so we developed our own
- We agreed that it is a long-distance working relationship between people from different organisations with a shared goal
- They may see each other every now and then, but they mostly work remotely

'Remote partnering refers to groups of people working together from different entities as part of a structured collaborative relationship who share a common social or environmental purpose and are accountable to each other, but who largely work long-distance across different locations, cultures and time zones rather than face-to-face'



Initial assumptions

Assumed challenges:

- Less effective
- Lower quality of relationship
- Communication difficulties
- Partners quickly reverting to ‘business as usual’

Imagined opportunities:

- Being able to connect to a wider range of partners
- Having a ‘flatter’ (less hierarchical) structure
- Developing a more context-specific way of working
- Suiting certain types (introverts, implementers) better (less meetings!)
- Opportunity to sharpen communication and learning skills



What did we want to know?



- What are the instances/conditions where remote partnering is **preferable**?
- What factors **support** effective remote partnering?
- What factors **hinder** effective remote partnering?
- How can working remotely be as **effective** as possible?

Our research methods:

- Literature review
- Interviews
- Online survey
- Case studies

Literature review – sources of information



- Database used: Web of Science
- Search terms: remote partnering, remote collaboration, distributed collaboration, distributed partnering, dispersed collaboration, dispersed partnering
- Snowball method
- 15 academic papers found published between 2006 - 2016

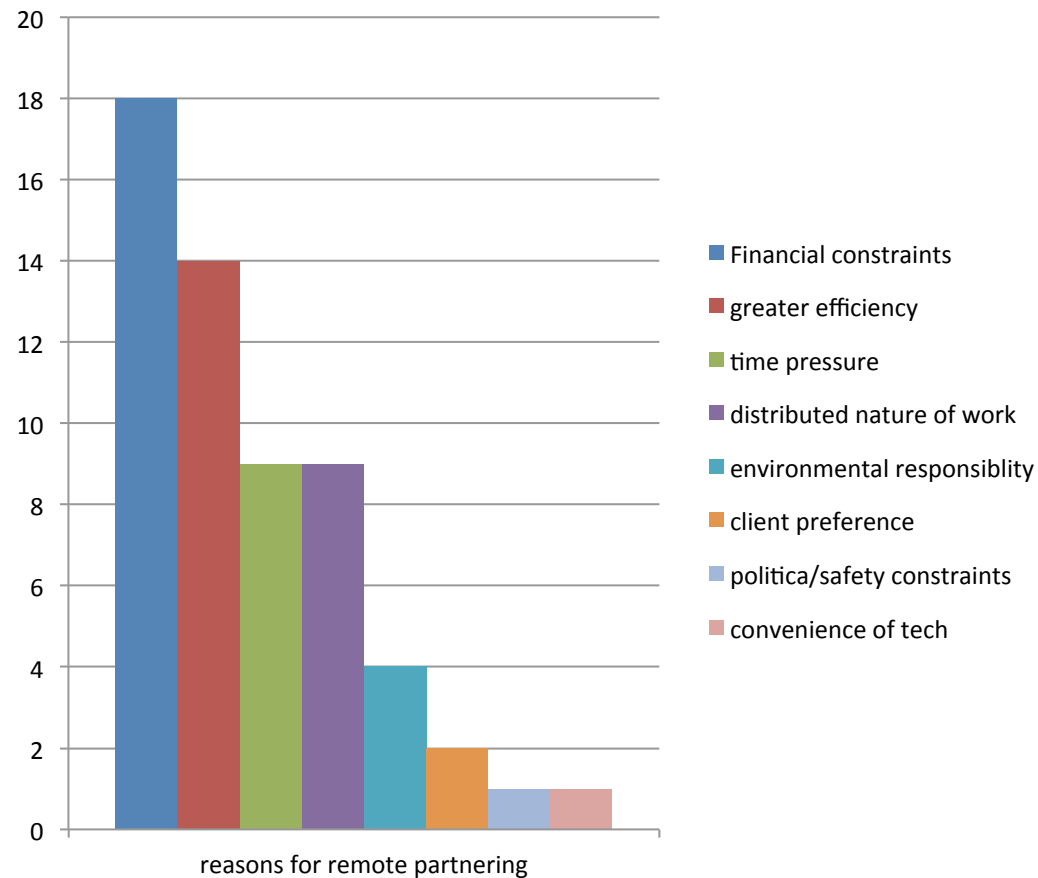
Literature review – summary of results

- Many papers are not about partnering per se (typically about remote team working – ie between people from one organisation)
- There is a positive relation between remote partnering and innovative performance
- Remote partnering might affect perceptions of one another
- Important to have a psychologically safe communication climate (openness, empathy)
- Remote partnering can be demanding as it requires flexibility and extra effort to communicate
- Equity becomes more nuanced in remote partnerships
- Partners experience context differently; this affects the relationship



Survey findings:

- For many, remote partnering is default and taken for granted



Other findings: Challenges

- Remoteness amplifies existing biases and lack of equity in relationships
- Fewer opportunities for building trust and cultural understanding
- Lack of time frequently cited
- Logistics and technology limitations
- Lower quality dialogue
- People not following through
- Not being able to support your partner so effectively



Other findings: Opportunities

- Greater sense of local ownership, autonomy & independence
- Creative and systematically applied protocols for virtual meeting
- Optimizing opportunities to build relationships
- Evolving a mix of communication methods



Ideas that could make a difference

- Plan for remote partnering as a specific and different way of working
- Pay more attention to remote facilitation / brokering
- Find new ways to build trust (that work in a long-distance scenario)
- Clearer and more equally distributed roles & responsibilities
- Build in face to face opportunities (all reported that some face to face contact made a very significant difference)
- Have regular meetings with clear structure and focus
- Use more inspiring technology
- Allow for informal communication
- Invest in skills development for partnering remotely
- Create an remote partnering resource pool
- Ensure learning for remote partnering is captured shared



Tips for effective remote partnering

(based on findings from the research)

- **Be properly prepared** – plan well for the contact time you have – *What do I want to share? What do I need from this exchange? How will I convey the things that matter? How can I help others understand my dilemmas?*
- **Be intentional / purposeful** – *Why are we connecting? How can we maximise this opportunity? What specific outcomes do we want / need?*
- **Ignite all the senses** – find ways of tuning in that will help to compensate for the realities of distance
- **Think in images / build pictures** – explore through metaphors, visioning, context-specific examples to convey facts, mood, sense of significance
- **Dance between stepping back** (servant) **and stepping up** (leadership) as and when the time is right
- **Use questions to achieve more** – challenge assumptions and be open to thinking differently
- **Take your full share of responsibility** for collective decisions, results, actions and outputs




The first exercise of the Design Lab was to invite each participant to make their mark (with a hand print) and then to find ways of connecting to the person opposite. It quickly became a metaphor for connecting long-distance:



“Being connected across distance does not mean meeting half way, it means really taking the trouble to understand where the other person is coming from”

“The shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line” (Lao Tsu)

“The journey itself really matters – partnering is as much about process as it is about projects. In long-distance partnering, the process can easily get overlooked. Without good processes we cannot deliver”



“Remote Partnering is as much about each individual’s unique role in taking initiative and carrying the partnership as it is about being connected”

Creating a vision for remote partnering

In an effective remote partnering system, partners get beyond the disadvantages and explore new ways of working together long-distance that give space for understanding each others constraints and building opportunities for innovation and breakthrough. They operate in a principled way though giving and receiving feedback, exploring how to work well together and being prepared to challenge and to change.

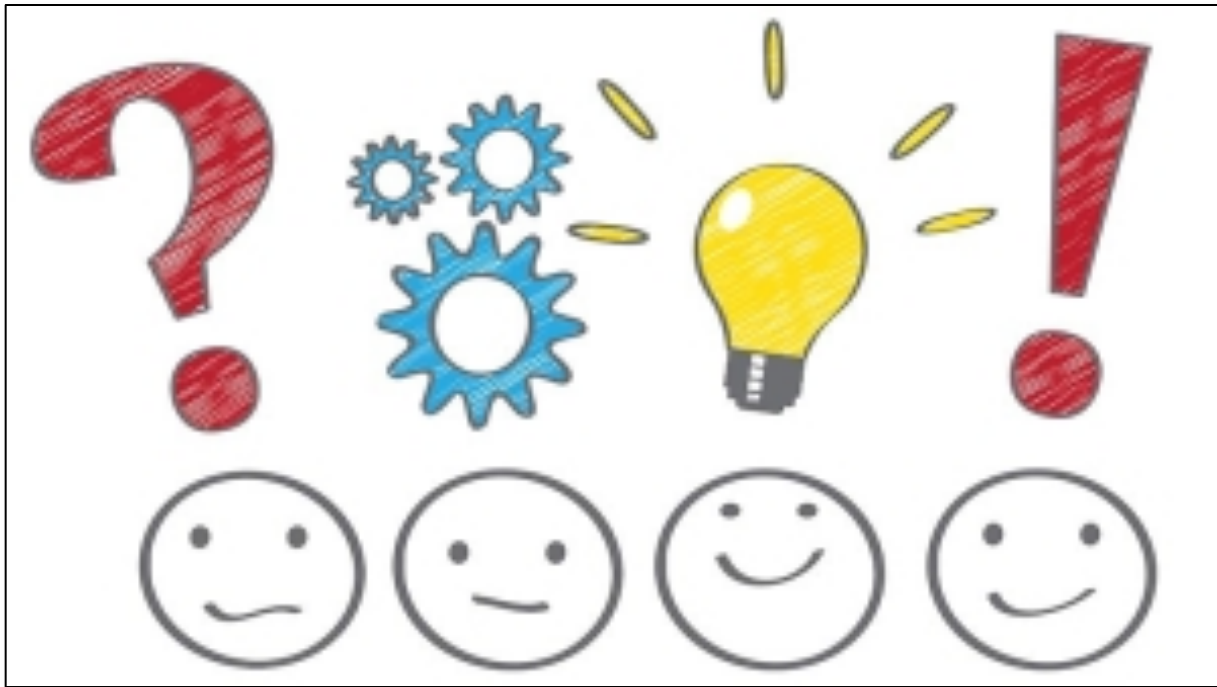
Diversity and distance become productive, as the separation gives time for individual reflection, imagination and re-framing that leads to new insights and collective action.

*Within the partnership, each partner can work
at their own pace, according to their own capabilities,
while focusing on the needs of their communities
and supporting the needs of others.*

Sharing this common thread of connectedness and consciousness, each partner feels genuinely empowered to weave an original story, embedded within the local culture, history and environment, that enables themselves and their community to evolve context-appropriate ways of doing new things.



Note: This definition was initiated by Reda Sedki during the Design Lab and then further nuanced



Further questions and expectations
from Design Lab participants

Questions	Expectations
How to apply and test the Design Lab experiences long-distance?	Find ways of building trust effectively in spite of long distance constraints
How to help partners optimize time and give the time it takes to partner effectively long-distance?	Shine a light on governance issues in a long distance scenario
How to create a truly exploratory partnering environment long-distance – things revert so quickly to ‘business as usual’?	Making innovative and creative approaches ‘safe’, appealing and purposeful for those not used to working in these ways
How can we help people overcome their ‘technophobia’ to enable them to optimize the many on-line ways of connecting?	Find ways to address innate contradictions (equity – flat structure vs accountability – linear relationships)
How can we clarify what is ‘just partnering’ (ie in any scenario) and what things are specific to partnering long-distance – are we sure the difference is as significant as is being proposed in this project?	Really focus on creativity in communication and in co-creating materials, approaches and guidelines. Continue to build the commitment to exploration, enquiry and emergence – making this ‘typical’ partnering good practice
How can remote partnering <u>really</u> tackle the key issue of power imbalance?	Recognise that partnering remotely will suit some personality types better than others and work out how to work with this usefully
How can we use this project to build courage and confidence in managing the partnering <u>process</u> not just project(s)?	How can remote partnering (and this project) really help promote the idea that every partnership is unique and needs to be forged in its own way?



Proposed Next Steps

for the Remote Partnering Project
as at February 6, 2017

7 'mini-projects' followed by the launch of an on-line product for practitioners working in remote partnerships

1. **PrC-led** – deepening the research work – Anne Marike Lokhurst as coordinator
2. **PBA-led** (based on-line out of India – Jo Pyres as coordinator)
3. **PAX-led** (building on their RPP priorities) (Mathieu Hermans as advisor)
4. **Stories from the front line**
5. **AAH-led** (Robina Shaheen as advisor)
6. **Detailed case study** (from a new entity that wishes to be involved)
7. **RPP on-line product planning** (with Reda Sadki)



Outputs from the Design Lab

(made available on the RPP website for further exploration and testing)

1. **Embedding Partnership Principles** – Building ideas on how to do this remotely when partnering long-distance
2. **Connecting Differently** – the use of games and stories in building insight, empathy and understanding
3. **Igniting the Senses** – to overcome the sense of distance
4. **Using Technology for Change** – introductory paper and video
5. **Language, Context and Time** – Three issues at the heart of partnering remotely
6. **Formal Report** – to partners and funders
7. **Outline plans for next steps**

