



**SUMMARY OF A FACILITATED CONVERSATION WITH  
A GROUP OF PARTNERSHIP BROKERS  
ON THE SUBJECT OF REMOTE PARTNERING**



# Record of the Conversation<sup>1</sup>

## Features / Challenges<sup>2</sup>

- *So much of partnering has to be face-to-face*
- *Without being face-to-face you cannot see how people are reacting or even engaging – seeing body language and facial expressions is crucial*
- *If all engagement is on line via skype, it is highly likely that those involved will not be really listening – everyone multi-tasks in these circumstances that's why they turn off the camera – so you get even less focus on partnering*
- *The challenges of time zones and language barriers are huge (one example was of a skype call that took 1 hour and 20 minutes to set up, working in 'Franglais' and was completely frustrating until they finally all connected with 10 minutes to go and everyone laughed... this was seen as the most useful bit of partnership building!)*
- *People seem to be far more disrespectful on line – they come to meetings ill-prepared and often do not actively contribute... leaving those with a greater sense of responsibility to carry disproportionately more*
- *The fact of having to partner remotely has made for a reality of 'English supremacy' and a marginalisation of other international, national or local languages*
- *Those who don't work comfortably in English are at an added disadvantage*
- *There is a real difference between having met before and continuing the relationship long-distance and never having met*
- *The sheer distance / separation may be experienced as breakdown / isolation*

## Possible Advantages:

- *Working remotely can be a real 'leveller' everyone experiences the same pain / challenges as human beings... it can take away some of the power dynamics*
- *Could work well with a clear devolution / allocation of roles and expecting a level of self-sufficiency and autonomy that is then reported back to the group – a more 'horizontal' way of working*
- *The example of NGOs and INGOs working on the Syria crisis – INGOs had to hand over / let go as they had no direct access – changed the (traditional / unhealthy) power / control dynamics*
- *May open up new / unexplored / unexpected opportunities by doing things differently*
- *Relocates the focus / locus of the work – more possible to build locally grown / locally owned partnerships*

---

<sup>1</sup> This took place as part of the PBA's Level 2 Advanced Partnership Brokering Skills course in London in November 2016. The group came from a range of geographies (including Australia, Canada, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Poland, Spain, UK and USA) and different experiences of 'remote' partnering (only one of those present did not have experience of partnering remotely)

<sup>2</sup> The points made below are reported verbatim, but they have been clustered under headings in this write-up to be more coherent for the reader / researcher

- *Need to build trust earlier and more consciously to be able to 'let go' and let things evolve locally – this could mean that partners move more quickly to cross boundaries and change behaviours*
- *May be easier to be 'constructively disruptive' and bring about change at a local level rather than imposing a centrally controlled agenda*
- *May give the space for people to work in very different ways (introverts vs extroverts etc)*
- *Could be developed to build on and celebrate cultural diversity – by co-creating a range of ways of working that suit different cultural preferences (stories vs log frames etc)*

#### **What it may take to do it better:**

- *Finding more imaginative / innovative / intelligent ways of communicating and keeping each other informed / engaged*
- *Work early on to define and agree the common purpose and to explore and align around priorities, accountabilities and how to address grievances (if things are not working well)*
- *Build on the personal / professional strengths of each person (not just their organisational role and immediate tasks) – ie how can they each contribute holistically to the whole partnership from their talents and preferences*
- *Build some metrics for how to assess the application / embedding of the 5 partnering principles in remote partnering*
- *Consider how some of the material on 'relational analytics' could be used in this context*
- *Learn from other sectors who may do this better (eg multi-national corporations)*
- *Be very precise about who will do what by when and how this will be followed up*
- *Be highly focussed and disciplined in the purpose and management of on-line meetings*
- *Use visuals – pie charts, graphics, cartoons, imagery, metaphors – to make the communications more precise and / or vivid*
- *Allow for emotional responses and find out how people are feeling – it is about them not just the project*
- *Distinguish between types of meeting – project focus or partnership focus / exploring or decision-making / sharing experiences or planning etc*
- *Working on the human connection as the single most important feature (and not reducing the meetings to management issues)*

#### **Considerations for those in the partnership-brokering role:**

- *PB may need to become accomplished at webinar / long-distance meeting management – a new and distinct skill*
- *PB should call on technical expertise if necessary*
- *PB role may become more that of a governance / accountability coordinator and less involvement in shaping / delivering (providing the partnering 'glue' between the different separated elements*
- *PB may need to work 1-2-1 with different players to review their incentives and encourage their active engagement*
- *PB may become more of a mentor / coach*

- *PB may need to set the tone for working long-distance in ways that are disciplined / well prepared / productive and fit for purpose and to encourage those involved to understand the need for commitment and investment in long distance active engagement*
- *PB may help in applying their particular skills in framing questions / picking up underlying tensions / opening the way to a more 'layered' exchange*
- *PB may help those involved to see time as a driver (for partnering efficiently) not an excuse (for poor partnering)*
- *PB could help the group co-create a remote partnering agreement / contract (similar to the learning agreement co-created by mentor and mentee in the PBA's Accreditation programme)*
- *PB could help in avoiding those partnering remotely becoming 'prisoners of the internet' by exploring and encouraging other ways to communicate*

Facilitated and recorded by  
Catherine Russ & Ros Tennyson  
[PBA Authorised Practitioner Trainers]