Embedding Partnering Principles
Building ideas on how to do this more effectively when partnering remotely

From the Remote Partnering Project Design Lab

January 2017

This session came at an early stage of the three-day Design Lab and was positioned as part of our enquiry into creativity (a strong theme of the whole Lab) and an exploration of what it would take to bring imagination and innovation to the challenges of partnering remotely. In other words, could remote partnering itself become a laboratory for invigorating the partnership paradigm rather than just operate as a 'poor relation' of partnerships that happen face-to-face? And if so, how?

The starting point for an exercise designed to explore key partnering principles and how to embed and work with them remotely, was a consideration of how our 'brains' work and how we can use a meditative approach to thinking, feeling and willing to make our partnering work more holistic in intent and in application.

Recent neuroscience findings[1] have revealed that we have complex and functional neural networks – or 'brains' – in our heart and gut as well as in our head, and that these other two are just as critical to effective decision making as our minds. In fact, we can understand these three separate centres of intelligence in our bodies, each with their own separate nervous systems operating independently of each other.

An instinctual understanding of these intelligence centres is illustrated throughout our colloquial ways of speaking: '*Listen to your gut instinct', 'Follow your heart', 'Deep in my heart I know', 'My gut feeling is that something is wrong'*. In spite of this, rather than making use of all three intelligence centres, we have an overwhelming tendency to overemphasise (and over value) one over the others. In the West, for example, there is a huge emphasis on the brain as the (only) centre of intelligence. In the East, alternatively, it is the heart's wisdom that is central. Partners working across continents and cultures all too often overlook intelligence centres that are different to their own. This can make working with each other across cultures very difficult and probably means many lost opportunities.

To optimise working remotely, there can be a significant advantage to engaging all three centres and becoming aware of the power and potency of each of their specialist functions:

• Head brain important for for executive decisions, including analytical and creative thought
• Heart brain important for empathy, relationships and values
• Gut brain important for will power, motivation and action

The group was invited to meditate / reflect on these three centres of intelligence and then to work in small groups to apply this three-fold approach to the implementation of the 5 key partnering principles Diversity, Equity, Openness, Mutual Benefit and Courage. The objective being to generate ideas and ways of engaging with these principles that would optimise all three centres of intelligence and ensure that these principles could be embedded as fully as possibly even when working remotely.

This is a work in progress, but it is hoped these approaches will help take individuals further and deeper into their partnering practices and widen the possibilities of remote partnering effectively.

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[1] **mBraining - Using your multiple brains to do cool stuff'** - Soosalu, G., Oka, M. is a comprehensive system for communicating with and integrating the wisdom and intelligence of all our brains. MBraining is a practical approach that starts with balanced breathing to access the intelligence of head, heart and gut - tuning into each of them and enabling each centre to 'talk to' each other.

Overcome concerns about differences…	…by CELEBRATING DIVERSITY
Mind	o Encourage endless and boundless curiosity about what is different / unique about each partner and what unexpected value each could bring to the partnership – for example, ask each partner to use technology to share something about themselves or their organisation they think other partners might not know about them o Change and reframe from an 'economy of scarcity' (what we don't have) to one of seeking and valuing what is available as 'abundance' – for example, by inviting each partner to articulate what they appreciate and value about the other partner(s) o Research into each partner's organisation / sector and drivers and find the 'hook' or the 'sweet spot' on which to build that optimises the differences and creates new value
Heart	o Demonstrate empathy by partners being invited to challenge their own assumptions, preconceptions and perspectives to open themselves to new insights and empathy for another's point of view – for example, each partner presents the particular constraints and challenges they are facing in their organisation or country of operation. o Recognise that none of us know what we don't know, and encourage each other to be willing to learn about each other – for example, partners feel open to being asked questions and giving fulsome answers when questioned o Be positively inclined to try and understand – engage warmly and with genuine interest
Will (gut)	o Find ways of bringing a real insight into the conditions and realities of each partner's context – for example, by finding ways to bring the situation to life using stories, images, descriptions that will give as vivid as possible a picture o Don't rush to agreement at the cost of fully exploring and relishing differences of opinion – for example, airing very different points of view may lead to unexpected and better actions / activities o Focus on being responsive rather than reactive and ensure there is 'space' for people to change and do the unexpected

Address power imbalance…	… by BUILDING EQUITY
Mind	o Encourage partners to explore the (im)balance of power in the partnership. For example, this could be done by conducting an anonymous on-line survey with partners to determine how they perceive the power relationships and what they each need to promote a more equitable relationship between partners and share the findings openly o Discuss and agree what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable and work to build as much equity as possible by reducing the 'non-negotiables' to the minimum o Consider what each partner contributes uniquely to the partnership – build the idea that it is not just those bringing money that contribute to the effectiveness of the partnership – put a value on non-cash contributions
Heart	o Convene a discussion on the issue of power and encourage people to be honest about feelings of powerlessness and discomfort o Acknowledge that there are many different kinds of power (visible, invisible, economic, political power, financial, personality etc.) and explore how each feels and how it impacts the partnership o Address feelings around change and uncertainty and the difficulties such feelings (usually unvoiced) create – for example, encourage the sharing of ideas on how each partner reacts to and works best with change so that they can support each other as and when needed
Will (gut)	o Change the rules of the game – for example by ensuring that roles are shared and too much power does not reside with one or two people – for example, rotate the role of chair and record-keeper o Make it a requirement that each person has the opportunity to comment on a key issue – for example, don't take silence as consent o Never let the loudest voices rule and find ways of including those who are quieter or feel less 'important' – for example, suggest each partner has a 'buddy' who will check in with them, support them, represent them and help them to become acclimatized to the partnership's culture and way of working

Deal with hidden agendas	… by CREATING A CULTURE OF OPENNESS
Mind	o Ask partners what they expect to contribute to the partnership (in the widest sense) <u>and</u> what they hope / expect to get from their engagement partnership o Create opportunities (a 'safe space') for probing to check out if there are any other issues that need to be aired or that may be unacceptable o Use the best technologies to have difficult conversations in relative safety focus on the interests and well-being of the partnership rather than personal attacks
Heart	o Devote some time online to non-work activities but such things that will enhance the relationships and make the partnership work better – for example, ask a different partner each time to start a meeting with a short game, ice-breaker or creative activity o Use images, metaphors or mood pictures (emoticons) to enable partners to reveal something about themselves and their feelings about the partnership – for example, invite everyone to bring an object that describes how they see the partnership. If no video, then send images via Skype or email. o Work with stories – for example, set a theme and invite one partner to tell a story with just one word and each partner adds another word until a story starts to emerge. Then discuss what the story has revealed about the different views of / feelings about the partnership
Will (gut)	o Demonstrate by example how to be open and honest in ways that strengthen rather than de-stabilise the partnership o Invent some 'games' or approaches that are used regularly as a quick 'check in' with partners – for example, asking each partner to share how they are managing right now by choosing one of three key words: Swimming, Surfing or Sinking – shorthand for *'Things are great', 'Things are OK', 'Things are going downhill'* – then explore what people have said and why o Be persistent, if things still feel 'hidden' – perhaps agree to some one-to-one discussions if people are nervous about bringing hidden agendas into the group – especially on line

Getting beyond competitiveness	… by WORKING FOR MUTUAL BENEFIT
\n\nMind	o Work out what is 'fair' and what each partner needs to be able to engage with the partnership rather than sit on the fence or insist on being 'competitive' o Establish the idea that all partners are entitled to 'receive' as well as 'give' and encourage them to be honest and clear about their expectations o Ensure that every player has an active role in the partnership and make this explicit, visible and accountable so that all stakeholders understand the commitment and mutual obligations involved (especially important long-distance)
\n\nHeart	o Find good stories / examples that will share experiences and feelings that come from a really mutual benefit partnership o Illustrate how 'value' and 'benefits' can be very broadly defined and very specific to different partners / people o Always acknowledge and warmly appreciate all contributions and check out how different partners feel about each others contributions (or lack of them) and level of engagement
\n\nWill (gut)	o Celebrate the partnership's achievements and the specific benefits to each partner o Cross promote the partnership and projects on each others' websites and networks, giving further endorsement / support to the causes close to each partners' interests / priorities o Build activities that support the 'moving on' process so that when the partnership ends, the benefits remain in place

Tackling fear and anxiety	… by BEING COURAGEOUS
Mind	o Build understanding of what each partner needs to know to be able to build a foundation of trust (essential for risk taking) o Encourage each partner to take on leadership roles in their own context, within their organisations and / or with their other important stakeholders o Encourage frank exploration and discussion of risk factors and work out how to mitigate and / or what level of risk is acceptable / necessary (in order to have desired impact)
Heart	o Be honest about fears – possible that many partners in most partnerships are really quite fearful of what will be expected and / or how hard it will be to deliver o Build a sense of psychological safety – for example, by asking what it is possible and not possible from each partners' perspective to achieve working remotely and online o Be prepared to give each partner as much autonomy as possible so they feel trusted and supported even when working remotely and in relative isolation
Will (gut)	o Create a 'fit for purpose' relationship and contact management system. Even more important in remote partnerships as there are less opportunities to clarify things (especially in big organisations) o Capture the experiences (good and bad) – for example in a log book or a case study o Insist on honesty about what hasn't worked so that lessons can be learnt and shared more widely – as a conscious commitment to the worldwide partnering paradigm