5GTT : October 2021 Collaboration Workshop Event – feedback from small table workshop sessions

1. Introduction

UK5G hosted the Collaboration Workshop event on the Remo virtual platform on 21st October 2021. The event was by invitation, with participants from across the 5G Testbeds & Trials Programme – project consortium members, their collaboration partners, and representation from DCMS, UK5G and Digital Catapult.

The goals of the workshop were threefold:

- share practical advice with each other on progressing our collaboration work

- think together as a cohort about how to maximise impact in showcasing project work

- network across the 5GTT cohort, to continue to build and deepen the web of connections that build an ecosystem

The agenda was as follows:

AGENDA

09:20 Ice Breaker session (Remo familiarisation)

09:30 Introduction to first workshop session – Richard Foggie, KTN

09:35 Workshop Session #1 – Effective Collaborative Topic Work

10.05 Break and networking

10:25 Introduction to second workshop session – Bob Driver, UK5G

10:30 Workshop Session #2 – Effective dissemination of project outcomes

11:00 Break and networking

11:20 Plenary feedback session – "Fish bowl" conversation – Peter Whale, UK5G

11:50 Summarise and Close

12:00 Networking session

12:30 End of session

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Workshop Sessions were held on small virtual tables of up to eight participants, one of whom was a member of the 5GTT Collaboration Team acting as scribe to take notes.

At the event, the opportunity to share feedback at a plenary "fishbowl conversation" was additionally provided, where participants could join the virtual stage to make a comment if they so wished. As it was not possible to hear detailed feedback from each of the tables, this document has been created from information captured by the scribes.

Comments have been anonymised, except where the context of knowing the project being referred to is particularly pertinent to the point being made.

2. Feedback from Workshop Session #1 – Effective Collaborative Topic Work

The following five sub-themes emerged from the workshop conversations:

- Top tips and lessons learnt in effective collaboration
- Examples of benefits gained through effective collaboration
- Examples of challenges in achieving effective collaboration
- Motivation, culture and communication for effective collaboration
- Spectrum, supply chain and equipment challenges

Although the key focus of the event was collaboration between projects and with external parties, there was also a lot of valuable reflection and feedback on collaboration *within* project consortia.

The feedback on spectrum, supply chain and equipment demonstrated that there had been a compelling need to network with and collaborate with other people and organisations to seek to overcome numerous challenges in these areas.

2.1. Top tips and lessons learnt in effective collaboration

"Align collaboration projects with key project deliverables."

"DCMS rules are okay - don't make the admin too burdensome."

"People don't answer emails. Maybe it is best to coordinate face to face [or virtual] meetings – despite the call on people's time."

"It is a challenge for projects to blend cultures. Agile start-ups with slow moving MNOs, Public with Private. Outlooks and attitudes towards sharing and cooperation can be radically different. MNOs in particular do not have it their DNA to share. Pace of decision making can also vary enormously. Cultural understanding and the building up of trust takes time."

"Really important to understand the motivations of why partners are taking part, as these motivations can be VASTLY different, especially when looking at an SME vs a Corporate enterprise. Working with a Corporate is hard, but they wouldn't not do it, due to the positive benefits."

"The size of a company will have a direct effect on why they are taking part in projects. Need to ask all parties: 'what do you want?!' Experience in the past says demonstrators don't actually last past the end of the project. So they have focused on other elements of IP such as training, skills, lessons learnt. And again, what parties in collaboration are likely to want from projects will often be affected by the size of the organisation."

"Don't have too many partners."

"Get on with each other and have open channels of communication."

"One thing [to do, is to have an] in person get together to help understand and reveal all parties' motivations. [Unfortunately] couldn't do it with 5GTT due to Covid."

"It's hard to describe [for example] a specific manufacturing capability on a Zoom call as people can't see the kit that's being talked about. Much easier to have them visit a centre and be shown something working and spark ideas and provide inspiration."

"Definitely encourage having a physical get together meeting BEFORE you form a consortium wherever possible. Also sort spectrum and kit BEFORE you start or as early as possible!"

"Having clear goals from all parties on what they need/want as an output is really helpful before you begin. " "[This] allows people to adjust or pivot and maximise alignments and identify potential clashes or issues as soon as possible, or even before they happen."

"It is essential to be transparent on any concerns and what's possible. Collaborative projects are not a sales business. There's no need to say "yes" to the 'customer', its collaboration: be clear and concise."

"Minimum goals and realism are important in collaboration. Minimum output versus stretch goals, let people know what to anticipate or expect. Collaboration is not the same as commercial work and you need to think differently about it."

"UK5G Innovation briefing Magazine is a great tool for collaboration and communication across the projects."

"Remo is a brilliant substitute for face-to-face networking."

2.2.   Examples of benefits gained through effective collaboration

"We've made good contacts outside of the consortium…to work through issues of getting the network right…. It's allowed us to increase our [professional] network."

"Neutral host collaboration work was very effective."

"Collaboration may have a multiplier effect. Our work in [one project] is helping our work in [another project]. This is the sort of information that is exchanged internally. There are lessons to be learned."

"Helpful to access the purchasing power of larger corporates."

"It is often the informal collaborations - chance meetings – that bear the most fruit."

"Devices workshops and shared licensing examples of practical help."

"Good to collaborate on suppliers and common partners. Eg: RDA autonomous pods are in use at Milton Keynes and West Midlands."

"In the barrier-busting area there is much more realisation of the co-dependency between MNOs and Councils – a far more collaborative approach is emerging."

"Spectrum workshop was successful. Showed off achievements and also gave a strength of numbers in the engagement with Ofcom and MNOs."

"…each project needs closely managing, but its good as it gives you a wider perspective and more background. Also, by collaborating with others means pain can be shortened for others as one team can deal with an issue that others can benefit from eg spectrum."

"In the projects we are trying to build knowledge together and we can gain from sharing information."

2.3.   Examples of challenges in achieving effective collaboration

"It's a challenge enough to get the internal project partners working together, let alone on inter-project collaboration."

"If we're struggling with collaboration within the projects it is not surprising that we aren't collaborating quite so much between projects."

"The projects in a consortium are a collaboration in themselves and at the early stages of the project you're very focused on getting that successfully running. While that activity is going on, trying to also think to the next level of inter project collaboration is just an extra plate to keep spinning. We need to work out when the best time in a project's life cycle to consider inter-project collaboration is. It's not at the start of projects."

"You end up spreading yourself quite thin, because they are so many other projects out there. There is a need to be more specific and scope your collaboration."

"It almost became that we were collaborating for the sake of collaborating rather than because it was useful for the projects."

"No trouble getting in touch with people ... but it's about the time to find something that may or may not prove of benefit."

"We've not had trouble getting in touch with people, it's the next step after that of doing something about it. [You can have a] great conversation but no follow up [may happen]."

"The collaboration lead should be independent of the lead partner and the reason for that is that the lead partner is going to be managing a load of other admin anyway and that's going to be an inward looking and the collaboration lead needs to be outward looking [with] the ability to leverage contacts to make things happen."

"As project budget is linked to project objectives, we were not permitted to engage with skills collaboration work as it was not linked to one of our project outcomes or milestones."

"Spend too much time spinning the actual work to fit the pre-defined work packages. There is too much focus on process and ticking off deliverables. No flexibility in achieving overall objectives by [for example] getting there via a different route. Management overhead of the projects is intense."

"[Following up on collaboration questionaries to gather information] has been hard – for many people it is 'important but not urgent' and so doesn't get done."

"Don't over stress about it … some companies are working across projects, which naturally leads to some good collaboration…don't let it distract from your [project] focus."

"Knowing when to get involved with things and when it is better to stand back. Want to help with everything but it just becomes too much."

"Expectations [on a collaboration] need to be managed effectively, with timescales aligned with partners."

"Folk can get frustrated at multiple engagements on collaborations - too many cooks- with nobody taking a lead. In some cases, collaboration can actually slow initiatives down."

"Projects can forget people doing the work at the end of the food chain. Engagement with relevant people can be an enormous struggle and take too long. Projects need to learn how to have whole team involvement."

"Lot of discussion on Basecamp [but lot less evidence of outputs]."

"Some partners can see each other as competitors, which doesn't aid collaboration, as people hold back in sharing information. Rather parties need to see that we are not competing, rather trying to build knowledge together."

2.4.   Motivation, culture and communication for effective collaboration

"Nobody's going to do this on a partial cost recovery basis we're looking to get technology at the bleeding edge because if people are being expected to do it on partial cost recovery the incentive of leading edge [companies] to do that in the UK is considerably less."

"To work correctly, collaboration activities should be funded at 100%. This is confirmed by all table participants – and many others at the event too. This would show DCMS attaches real importance to this – so projects must too. New guidance far better – but too late for this round and Covid then hurt all of us."

"I think it's quite low down on our agenda, the limited time that people have got to spend on the project … people are reluctant to engage in the collaboration because it's sort of external to the original thing and we said at the beginning you're supposed to spend two or three percent of your budget on it but actually there's nothing to make you do that. The collaboration should be 100% funded so if we say you know you're going to do two or three percent of two or three percent 100% from the collaboration bit to encourage you to do it rather than think you're taking it out of something else."

"Need to be able to earn or claim on the time spent. If only 4% of project funding is tied up with collaboration, projects will always focus on the 96%! Needs a dedicated pot."

"An incentive is always going to work. Especially if there is no other motivation."

"Why is collaboration so important to DCMS? What are they getting out of it? How are they using all this information? We get no report, no feedback. Why is it such an important metric for the government?"

"If you're running a research project it's the sort of things that you want to see happening but it's not something the participants want to do. I don't know if it really gets you anywhere because people just want to do their own projects."

"Collaborations must lead to benefit - likely to succeed if they contribute to main project objectives" eg: Milton Keynes (a stadium) is hosting a meeting with Project Vista (cameras in stadiums) - there are clear potential mutual benefit to explore. So, collaborations need to satisfy a joint need."

"Transparent and open working practices are not automatic. If a partner organisation has a significant problem, sometimes this is not shared until too late. Need to have an environment of high trust."

"Consortia are all different - people in them have different motivations. Not automatically dedicated to shared innovation."

"It is a challenge for projects to blend cultures. Agile start-ups with slow moving MNOs, Public with Private. Outlooks and attitudes towards sharing and cooperation can be radically different. MNOs in particular do not have it their DNA to share. Pace of decision making can also vary enormously. Cultural understanding and the building up of trust takes time."

"Projects all structure themselves differently. But it was important [in our project] to have a culture where it is alright to fail."

"Sometimes motivations can be more political - especially if involving local govt."

"Frustrating that we don't see all the partners from all the other projects sharing information with us or contacting us. We have tried to put ourselves out and connect with other projects…. but then partners disappear and don't come back. Some consider us as competitors and avoid sharing information with us and it doesn't help collaboration move forwards. We are not competing."

2.5.   Spectrum, supply chain and equipment challenges

"Spectrum is a key issue. Despite talking about a "shared spectrum revolution" - the experience on the ground is very different. Number of licences issued is low, level of power permitted is too low, Channel bandwidth is restricted. If you are a testbed, you get placed in a development licensing."

"An issue with devices is having a capability to test and prove them. Operators have large capabilities for testing that the projects just don't have access to."

"Projects do not have lab facilities where you can do a detailed analysis of why something is not working correctly or why it's failing against the network."

"Early on tried to gather information from people across the programme to find out who wanted what… [However, with a poor level of detail in feedback] you can't do anything with that level of feedback and that is part of the problem."

"Actually understanding wireless communications is where [knowledge across the projects] becomes really patchy."

"All these projects held back by devices, as no one [vendor] is following the standards". "[Lack of] interoperability prevents diversification."

"[Projects focussed on] general availability of handsets that worked in the right band and [many of the] projects lack understanding of [for example] what a standalone handset is, with no understanding of the underlying technology….so I think that us a big impediment]."

"The single point of failure shared amongst all projects, is supply chain and getting equipment on time and in line."

"We got order for kit in the 1st week [of the project] and that has paid huge dividends."

"The dropping of Chinese kit and suppliers from eco-system has caused huge issues. But it's also created an opportunity for UK production and sovereign capability. With reliance on China, a bottle neck was inevitable."

[Some projects rely upon a] key facet of position location over 5G. [However] this is standardised in Release 16, and we can't even get handsets that work properly in standalone in Release 15… had to ditch position over 5G because we can't get any support… and position accuracy … is pretty awful".

3. Feedback from Workshop Session #2 – Effective dissemination of project outcomes

"What can we learn from the showcasing of the previous phase of the programme – who did this well?"

"In the past each project did their own individual event, with no sense of collective endeavour."

"Some projects have a stronger focus on marketing and comms than others."

"Lot more of us now [ie number of projects in the programme]."

"Project need to report their outcomes towards the end of the programme – which can feed into the conference."

"Milton Keynes have their showcase event on the 14th February 2022."

"Plans are afoot for an event for Live & Wild."

"MONeH – no plans in place just yet."

"Some projects may wish to be involved in the events of other projects, especially where they have similar use cases. [Therefore] it's really useful to know when everyone else are planning their events for."

"Focus of the conference needs to be outbound – to regulators and internationally."

"What should we show? Show what we've learnt? Who is the audience?"

"Need to create a value proposition to sell the event … accept early days, but [the projects] would like a voice in our event."

"Event should be in a rural area…with rural areas that are in real hardship losing out again to an urban location". "Need government to get 'mud on their wellies' ". "Need to ensure "working with" and not "doing to" the projects.

"It's good to have a 5G private network available to show off use cases – suggestion to bring a 5G private network 'in a box'."

"Having Ofcom and other Government departments (especially DEFRA and BEIS) present would be important. Real concerns evident in the spectrum arena."

"Can we get the BBC to film it? They are in the programme."

"Have live activities and get the TV networks interested."

"Not all are ready to showcase – difficult to bring our shiny new towers! Also Covid has impacted some more than others."

Simon Rockman volunteered to help with any spectrum requirements for the Showcase event.

"Far East clients are very interested in how the UK has done collaboration to deliver 5G. Particularly interested in how the public and private collaborations have been formed as it's an area seen as difficult to achieve."

"Only issue with [the proposed conference] dates for an event is its slap in the period of mad year end and project end for all projects and you may find it hard to get them to engage with a few days out and away from the work that needs doing."

"If the event is a face-to-face exhibition then the most benefit isn't from 'men in suits with brochures', it's from physical kit, buttons to push and things to watch working. That's what the majority of collaboration has been working towards and so should be key."

28th October 2021