DisCO
Distributed Co-design

Pilot studies report

Community and Public Sector cluster - Beyond Imagination
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DisCO
Distributed co-design

Contents

Background

People

Creative interactions

In a period of physical distancing, there has been a shift from in-person workshops toward online approaches that uses apps, platforms and tools to support the engagement with internal and external research partners. The Imagination team have been gathering resources about this matter, which includes blogs, articles, best practices and so on. Considering this opportunity, the community cluster proposed a pilot project called DisCo (Distributed Co-design), where we could exchange ideas and reflections, and design new creative interactions to work in collaboration with our internal and external partners through a series of online workshops. In these workshops, we aim to test a framework that addresses the research question: How can new distributed co-design approaches be created?

In distributed co-design, communities work together in a design process that can be spatially and temporally distributed over the Internet, where creative interactions are used to support those involved in the process to meet an agreed objective. These interactions are supported by apps, platforms, social media, and digital tools that enable participants to exchange ideas, expertise, and experiences to achieve desired outcomes. In essence, most of these online resources allow interpretation, so we can appropriate and creatively use them in our own way.

This approach aims at designing and delivering creative engagement activities using existing technologies, platforms and apps (e.g. Miro, trello, Microsoft Teams) and services (e.g. Postal services) to work collaboratively with external partners and communities in research projects at distance. To test our approach, we have delivered two online workshops using different technologies:
(1)   We explored and developed creative ways of remote engagement within research groups and external organisations with our Imagination colleagues using Microsoft Teams.
(2)   We facilitated a session where our external partners developed creative approaches to evaluate their own projects using Zoom.
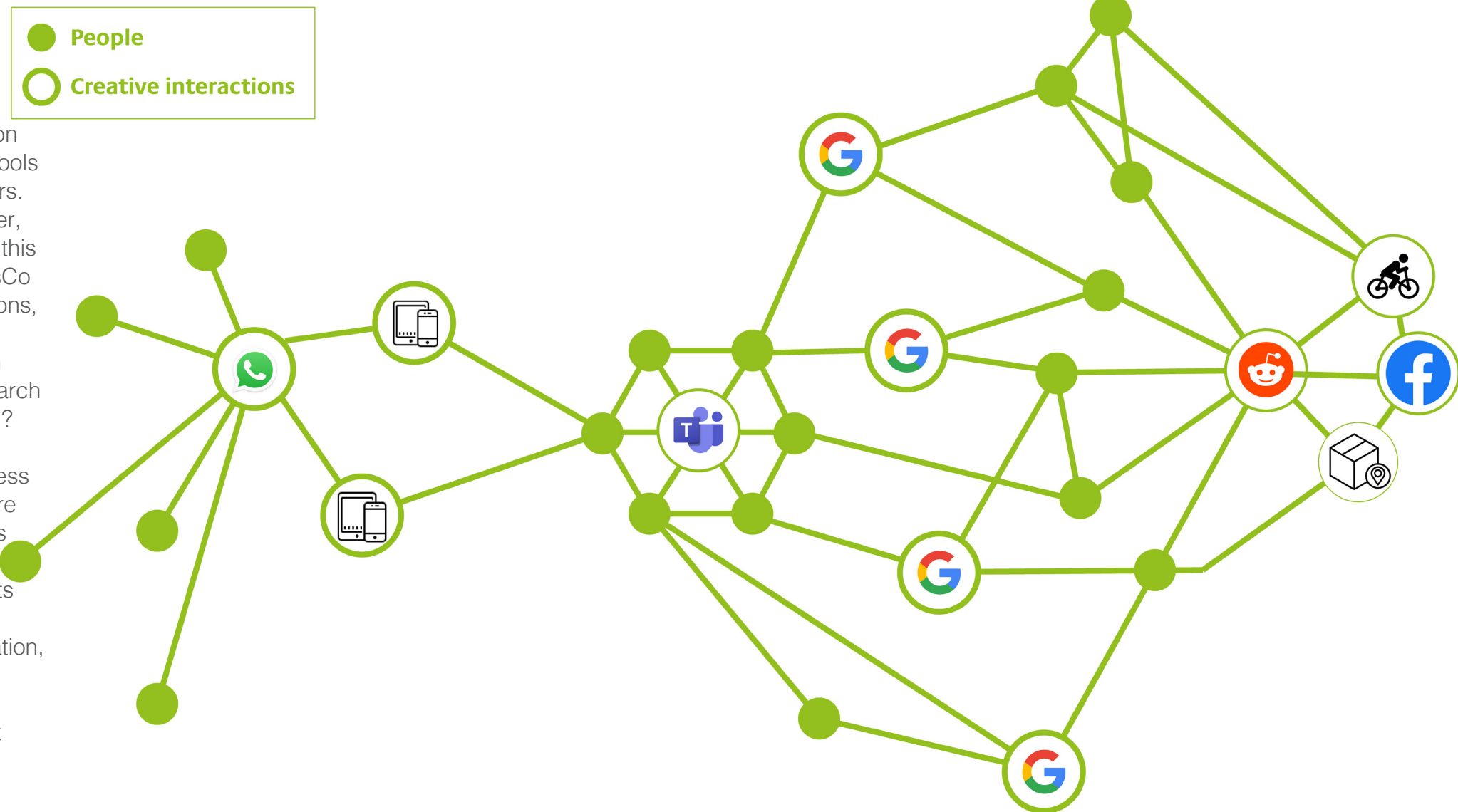
Pilot study 1

In April, Rosendy Galabo, David Pérez and Leon Cruickshank delivered an online workshop to Imagination team. This was held in the Microsoft Teams platform, where over 30 participants attended the session.

The aim of this pilot was to create a repository of insights and resources that can give inspiration to design creative approaches to conduct research at distance.

The online session was structured as follows:

Focus	Activity
Start	• Participants join the online session
Introduction	• Welcome, orientation and briefing • Ice breaker activity: quick introductions • Distributed co-design and creative interactions definitions, and workshop objective.
Identifying challenges	• Participants identify the challenges of doing workshops at distance as a group
Exploring opportunities	• In small groups, participants discuss and generate ideas to address a challenge
Presentation and feedback	• Each group presents their ideas and receive feedback on their proposals
Wrap up	• Conclusion and appreciation for participants' contribution

Workshop objective

Create a repository of insights and resources that can give inspiration to design creative approaches to conduct research at distance.
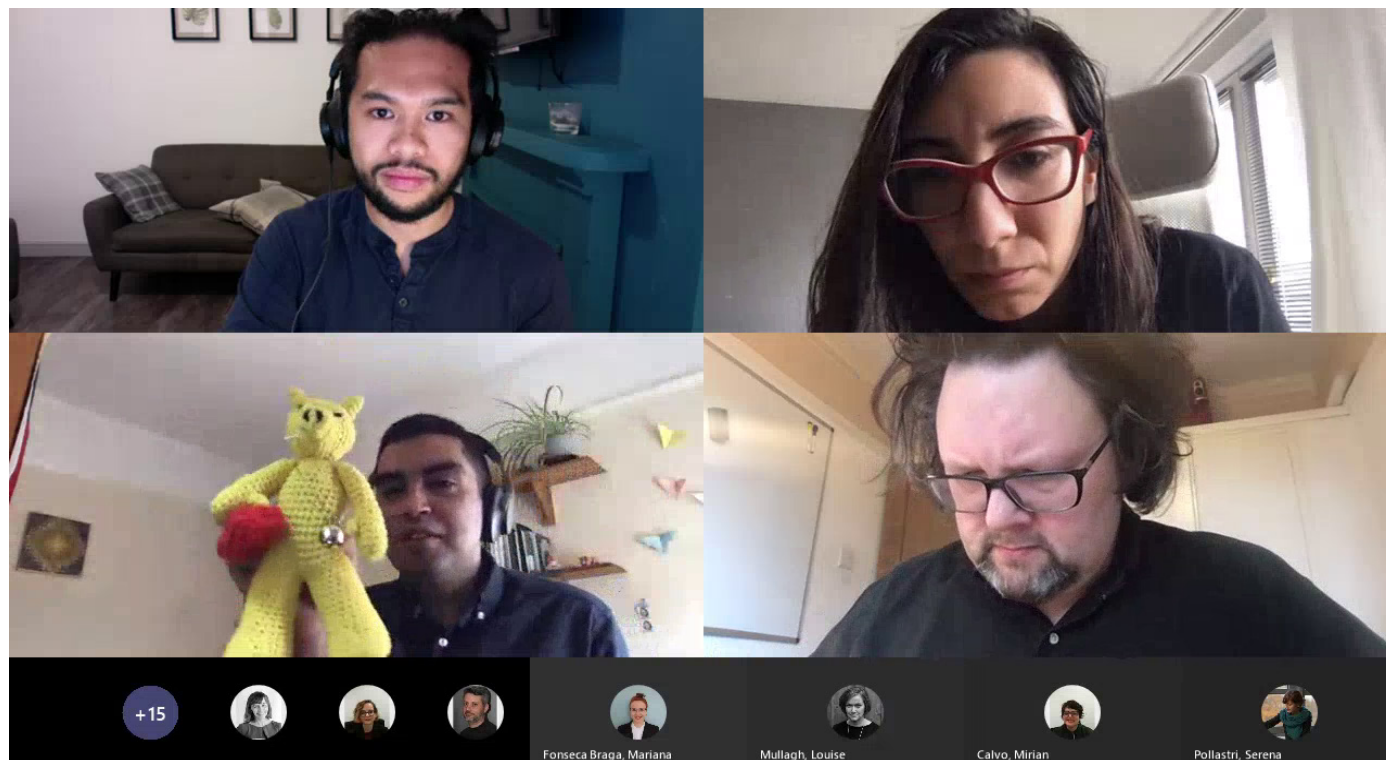
Introduction slide

Fonseca Braga, Mariana   Mullagh, Louise   Calvo, Mirian   Pollastri, Serena

Ice breaker

Co-design activities
Introductory activities

- **Getting together** – Participants join the online meeting, whilst we check the resources produced for the session, such as cameras, microphones, channels, and presentation slides.

- **Introduction** – We set expectations of online sessions, and provide definitions of distributed co-design and creative ienteractions, present the workshop objective and agenda. Then, we provide instructions about how to interact in Microsoft Teams.

- **Ice-breaker activity** – We asked participants to select an object around them and to tell something interesting intersting about it in less than 10 seconds. Once one finishes presenting an object, the next one quickly starts presenting their selected object. Then we ask participants to type ok in the chat to check if they understood the activity and also to create a presentation order.

Co-design activities
Identifying challenges

Can you list ONE challenge of doing workshops at distance?

In the first stage, we ask the participants to list one challenge of doing online workshops using a collaborative PowerPoint template. Then we ask them to highlight the main challenges up to 5 using a bold font or different font colour, which are listed as follows
(1) Body language,
(2) Using tech effectively
(3) Lack of flow to conversation
(4) Genuine interaction with laughter and warm
(5) poor UK Broadband infrastructure.

Can you list ONE challenge of doing workshops at distance? — DisCO Workshop (Distributed Co-design)

• Evaluate the DisCO approach in a creative manner	• hard to 'create a space' while we are all subjected to different home distractions	•Stay focused and engaged	•Concurrency- speaking at the same time	• Technical difficulties (connection etc.)
• Not being able to get the body language you get in person – visual cues	• Not being able to pass physical objects, paper etc directly from one person to another	• Presenting and reading chat at the same time	• Lack of flow to conversation	•Communication: body language, emotional connection (human-human to technology mediated Human-human)
•Coming up with new ideas togeheter	Having people sat in one place all the time•	Participants not having access to technology to do online workshops	• Access to internet (e.g. vulnerable communities)	
• people sneaking off to grab a coffee, go to the toilet etc.	• forgetting to un-mute	•Non-verbal communication	• Typing sounds if people don't mute!	NO background noise! - Weird
• difficult to focus	• using technology to communicate and work effectively- it is cumbersome	• distractions – kids/family/pets/phones	•Having interactions that feel like genuine connections with, laughter and warmth	• Technology Adoption
• feels void of feelings	•Finding a suitable platform	• Poor UK Broadband Infrastructure	• Stuttering flow of activities / tech latency / Eyes get tired	Different mindset•
• flow – so difficult to understand turns when no sounds or video	• Connectivity drops on the hour as contention spikes.	• Turn-taking	• Personal communication	• I cant read body language.

Shared powerpoint template
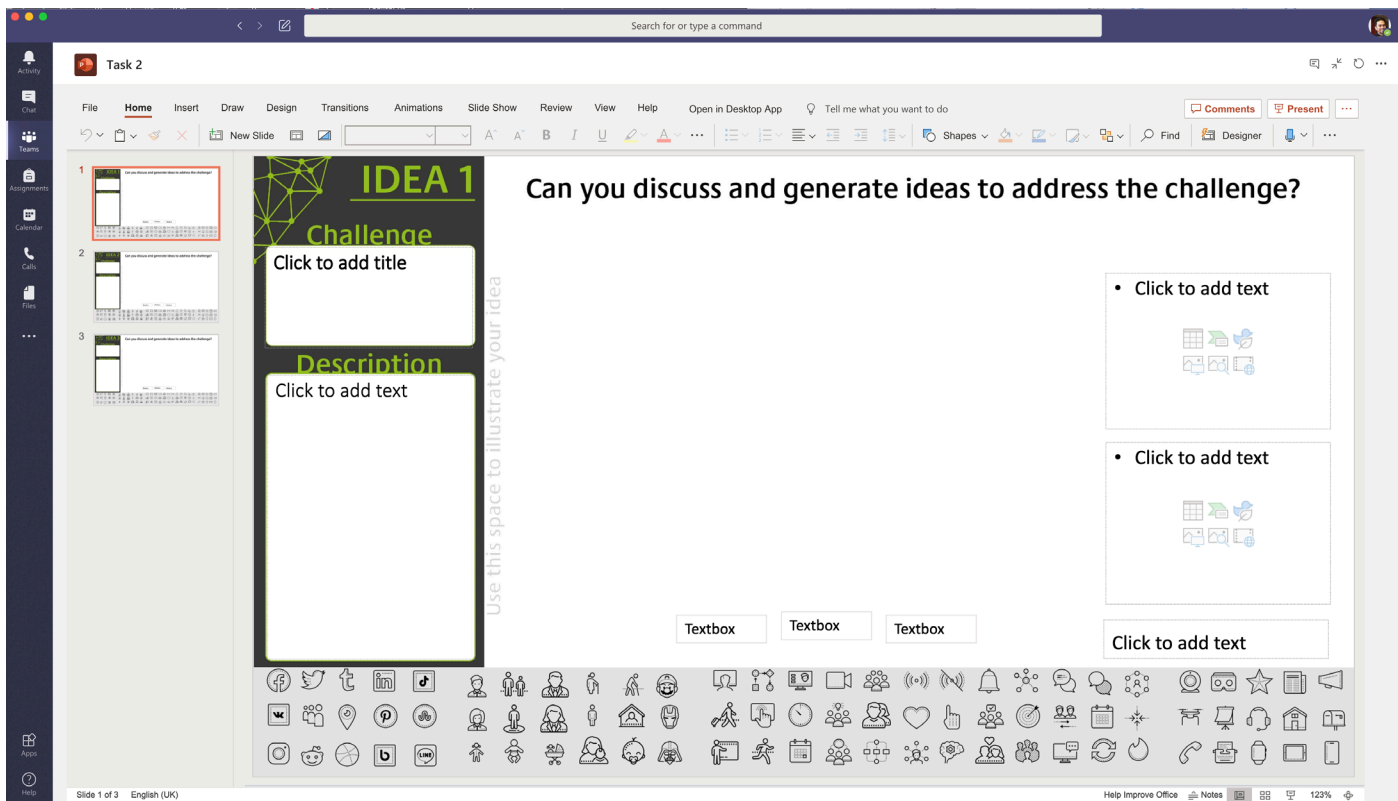

Participant's screen

Co-design activities
Exploring opportunities

Can you discuss and generate ideas to address the challenge?
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In the second stage, participants worked in small groups to generate ideas to address the five challenges of doing online workshops using a collaborative PowerPoint template (see side image).

We explained the function of the template and provide instructions on how to complete the task. Then we asked participants to type ok in the chat to check if they understood the activity and also to form groups of 5.

We instructed participants to type the challenge we assigned to each group, asked them to discuss and create a short description to frame their challenge, and generate ideas to address it.

Example of output

Workshops outputs
Presentation and feedback

Outcomes
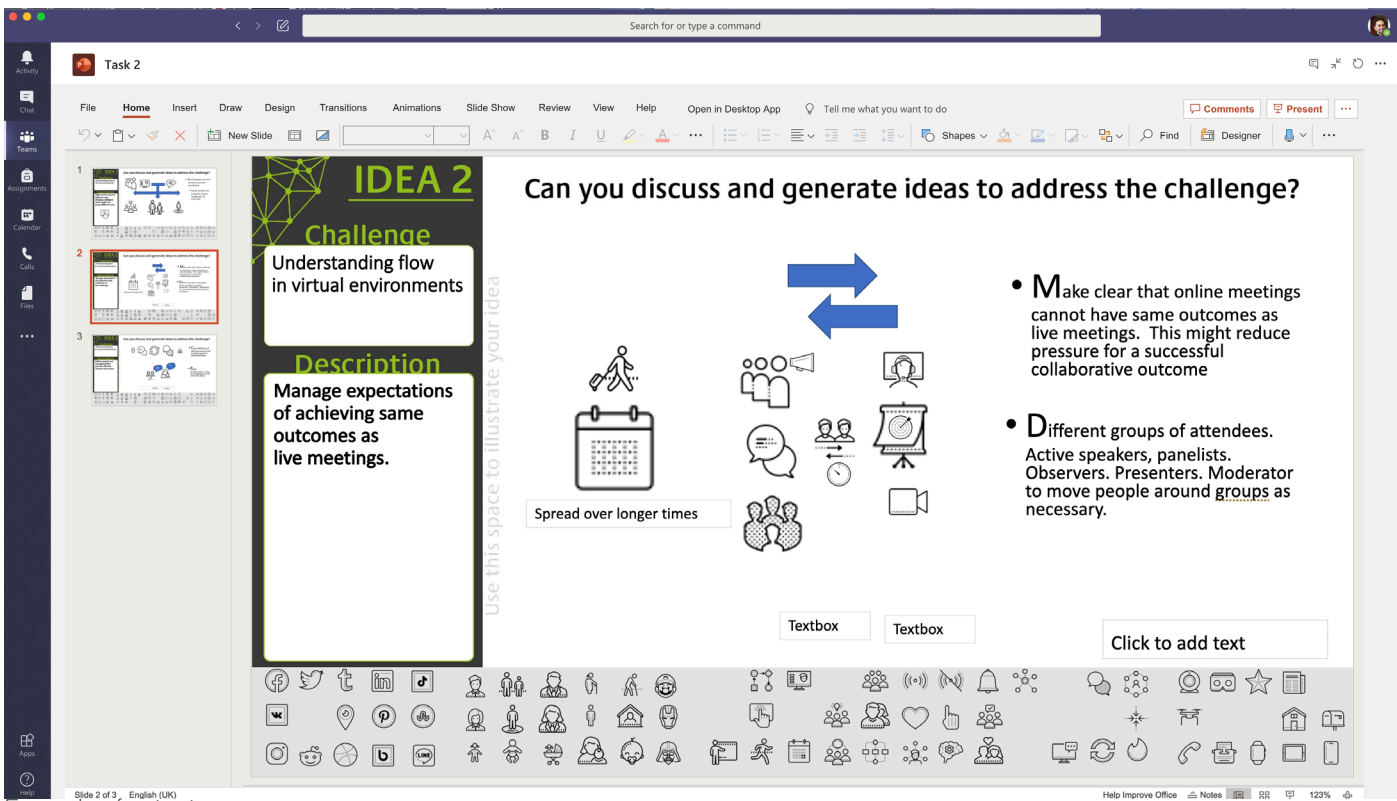Finally, we asked each group to present their ideas and provide comments to all proposals. A repository of insights as the outputs of this online session is described as follows:

Challenge: Poor UK broadband infrastructure
The challenge is not actually the infrastructure, but also inequalities and different people, different packages, different devices, different age ranges or countries may not think of fast broadband, e.g. like China. It's also not the broadband, but different access and different infrastructure people have in their homes. People might not have the space where they might feel comfortable participating in the workshop (accessibility issues). The group of participants provided two ideas to address this challenge.

Shared meeting background
Use a shared meeting background instead of sharing their houses as the background to make the environment an even field, more accessible and more equal as people may not want to show their homes.

Low tech workshops for more accessible meetings
Check whether there is a need for using video, or voice, just text, asynchronous workshops, or contributing in a shared document or a mix of them together in order to collaborate with others instead of using high bandwidth systems that such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

Challenge: Understanding flow in virtual environments
Part of the issue is to retain a physical presence: eye contact, body language. The group of participants focused on ideas to overcome the breakup of the flow in environments, and the technical and social issues.

### Use different softwares for different size of groups
Zoom and other types of software could be more appropriate for larger groups, whereas collaborative projects using shared documents work better with smaller groups. It is fun to move things around collectively, but often when you are sitting down and do the same activity, people can start judging clients and participants who have moved the main idea of the space, and kind of get annoyed with them through body language as it is really difficult communicate that due to the limitations of the virtual environment.

Make clear the expectations of online virtual meetings and the limitations of the process
Participants might feel less pressured to come out with the similar outcomes that can be achieved in physical meetings. Making clear that it is difficult to maintain the similar outcomes can help people to feel less worried, concerned and pressured.

Definition of control and management
Making clear who has the control of the template can sometimes be more inclusive and effective. The establishment of a kind of rule set for this is how this can address the issue. This discussion can actually lead to a resilient and more democratic approach to interactive sessions. This concept is relatively obvious principle in physical workshop, but it is an interesting concept to be used in virtual environments in terms of inclusivity (e.g. how to ask questions and raise new ideas).
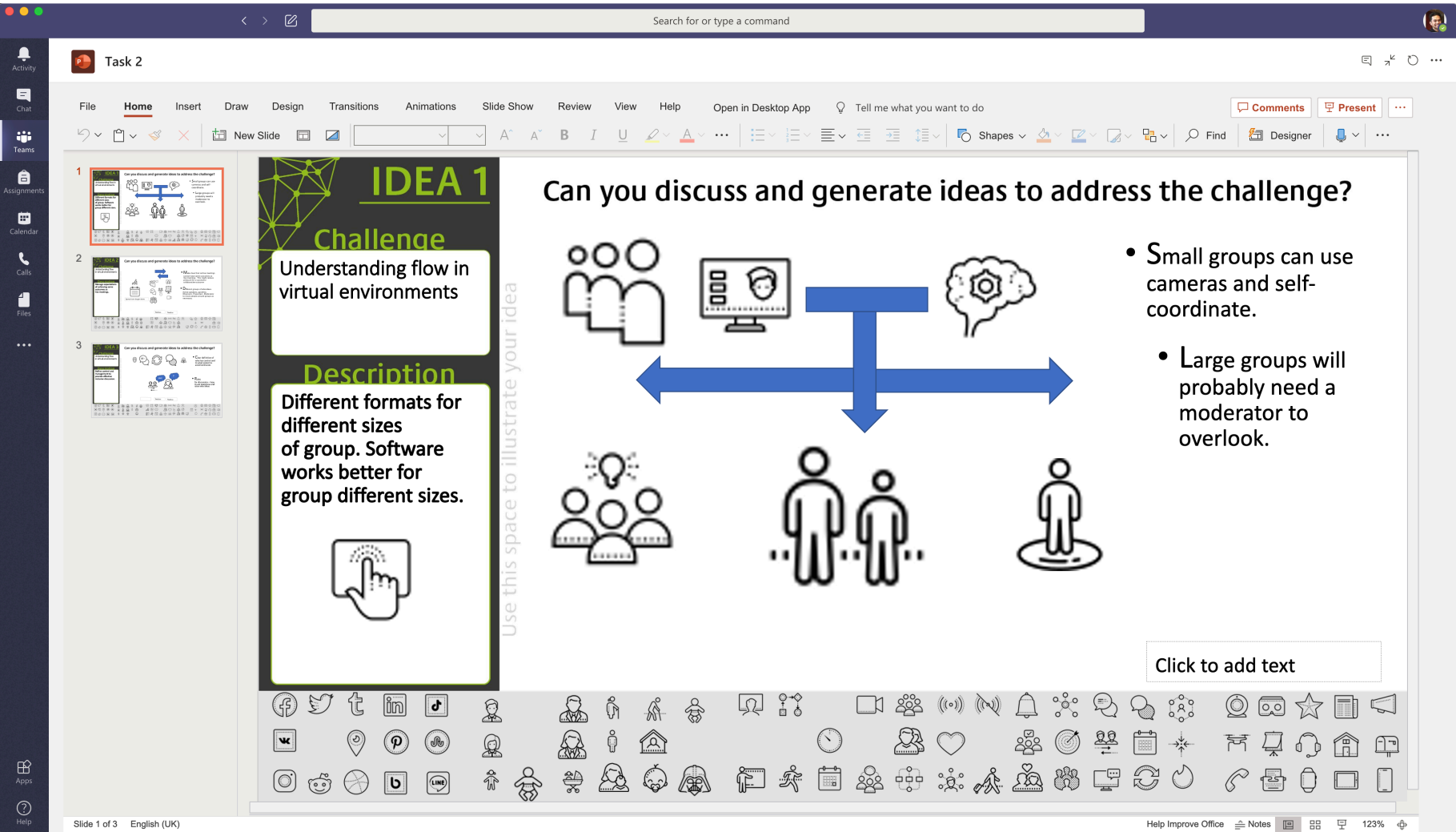
Challenge: Genuine interactions with laughter and warm

A workshop discussion about fun feels like not very fun. A workshop should do bring a different space or different set of rules, but technologies do things that get it on the way.

Playing with the online language

In the context of online interactions, there is well-established ways to develop fun and exchange jokes. They do not really involve the social turn taking that occurs in face to face conversations such as gifs, and activities that could be facilitated through these sort of tools. Gifs are a sort of reaction and interesting clue to sort of understand how different structures or mechanisms look like when they are used in a digital context rather than in a physical one. There will be a big difference between people's literacy in things like gifs and memes. If a person spend loads of time online they will know how to use them and will not get offended by them.

Getting beyond the screen

In physical workshops, participants are never sat down but moving around and taking advantage of the space. There are different ways to introduce a bit of physical challenges to online environments, such as ways of getting people moving around or taking their computers with them to get beyond the kind of staring into the screen in a different type of interaction.

Challenge: Using Tech effectively

The challenge is not trying to work with technology, but people working with people. It is about making these online workshops and interactions real?

Finding the right technology for the group

Find the right technology for the medium and the group, and involve people who you're working with to actually define what technology that should be used for doing experiments

Ice-breakers and coffee breaks

Often in meeting, conferences, and workshops, the interactions with people that you make the cup of tea during coffee breaks and ice breakers are when you really get to know participants and their organisations. Try to think about these social interactions when you're using technology to design your workshop and how you can build in those interactions and create that sense of fun.

Context situated

Sometimes it is just a phone call, if not it is a workshop. Thinking about the people in the group you are trying to engage to think about your approach. For example, if you're working with refugees, then you have to be very careful about what to show in their house. The platform you use is analogous to the location of the physical workshop. It might be appropriate to have a voice conference call, or game environments, such as fortnite.

Challenge:Body language

You may or may not be able to see participants, resolution may be low, taking turns without interrupting each other can be challenging.

Avoid multiple interactions at the same time

There needs to be a technological flexibility to accommodate different participants' needs, and simplifying tasks as much as possible. Edit a document and also maintaining a conversation usually is difficult.
Speak on the phone is more intuitive, but having the screen might be too distractive.
It is a different mode of interaction compared to face to face, that we need to become more affluent in. It requires, looking at an alternative communication language (e.g. signs, gifs and things) that needs to be designed in a way that enables that fluency.

Body language
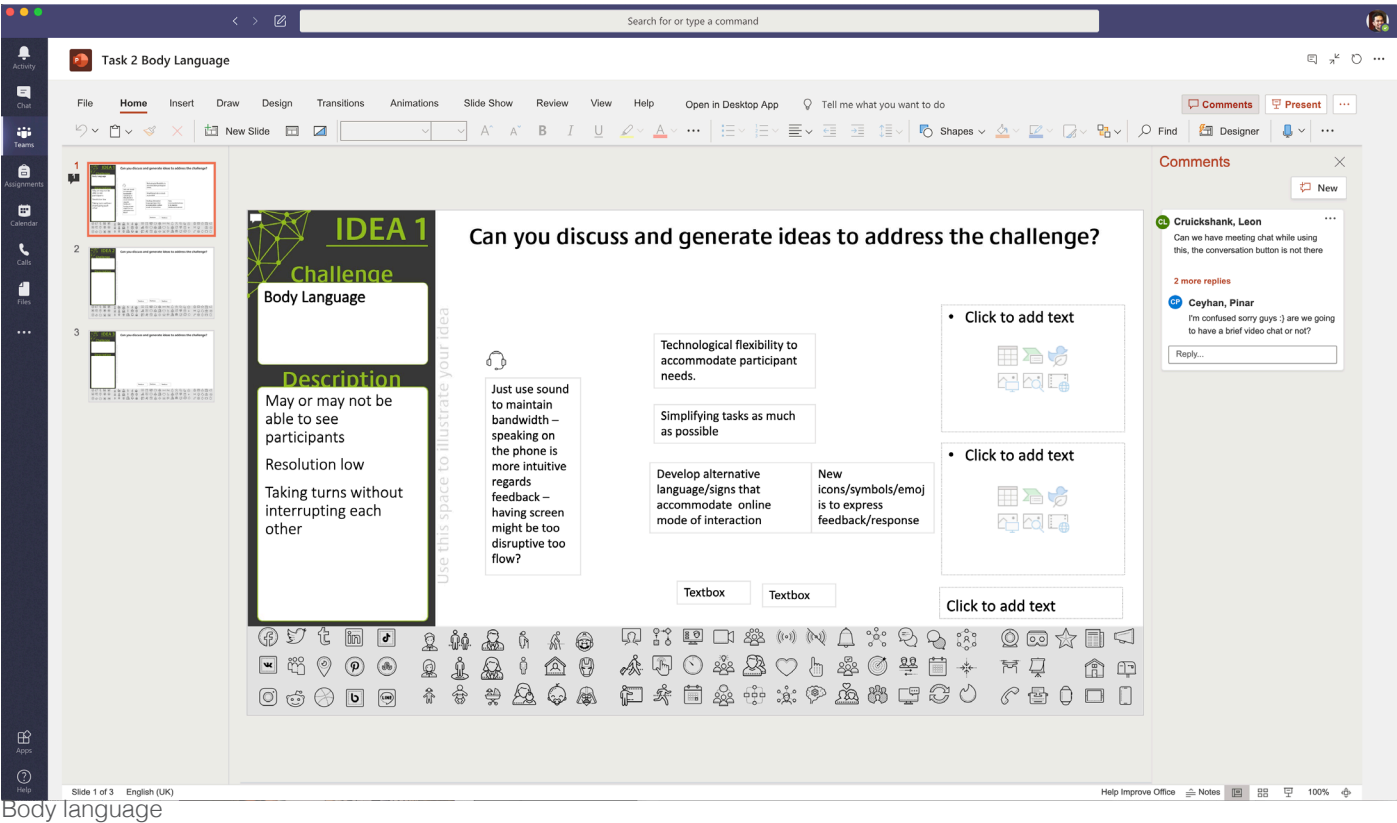
Next steps

At the end of the workshop, participants expressed gratitude for helping the team to be more creative in their projects, promoting new thinking and ideas.
After the workshop, the community and public sector team had a debrief session providing further insights that is summarised in the principles presented in Page 22.
We tested some of these ideas on the workshop presented in the following section.

Pilot study 2
Creating the tools to measure success

In May, Leon Cruickshank, David Pérez and Rosendy Galabo delivered an online workshop to an external partner: Together An Active Future (TaAF) team. We arranged with Ken Barnsley and TaAF team to run a workshop to introduce some of Leapfrog evaluation tools to 6 local teams (10 people) in order to develop creative evaluation approaches.

The online session was structured as follows:

Focus	Activity
Pre-event	• Participants identify a program they wish to evaluate and define 3 success criteria
Start	• Chance to do the homework if not done
Introduction	• Welcome, house keeping aims for the day • Setting the scene: Pathfinder activity and test and learn • Ice breaker
V&A evaluation swirl	• Evaluation V&A Swirl (activity, analysis, insights)
District presentation	• Each district briefly describe criteria for activity to be evaluated
Present V&A evaluation tools	• Presentations: Evaluation criteria and Skeletons V&A. • DAVID evaluation requirement
Develop creative evaluation approaches	• Develop evaluation approaches in groups of 2
Report back	• Reporting back: Describe evaluation approaches and resources used
Discussion and improvement	• Discussion and suggestions for improvement
Wrap up	• Further activities to think about analysis and insight sharing

Co-design process

For this online session, we tried out an ice breaker that required them to go beyond the screen and find three objects that could help them measure something, so participants could get warmed up for the following activities. We presented some of the evaluation tools co-designed in Leapfrog, and then we asked participants to work in pairs to develop creative evaluation approaches, and discuss and improve their ideas as a team. The TaAF team will carry on with refining their approaches and put them in practice as a result of this online workshop
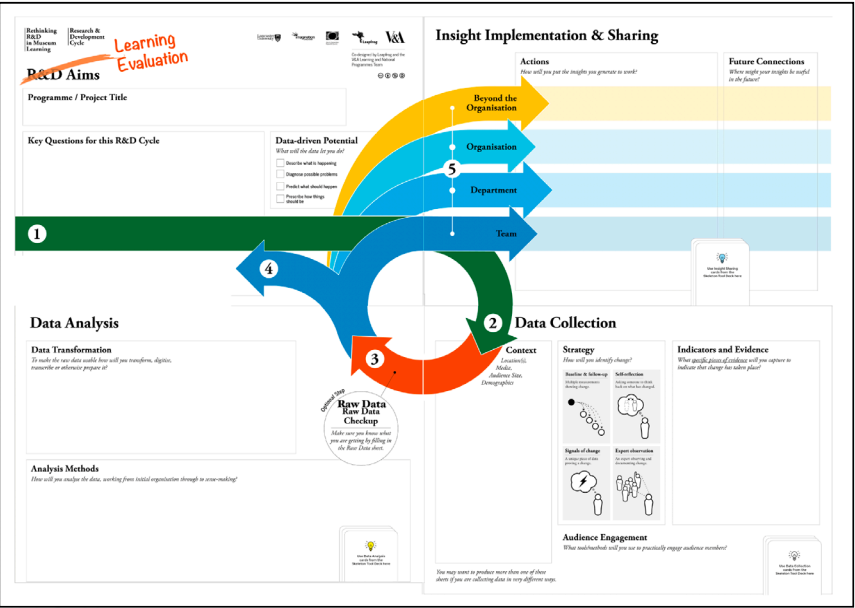

DAVID test:

Generate **D**ata

Be able to be **A**nalysed

Give **V**aluable Information

Be usefully shared and **D**isseminated

DAVID test

V&A Swirl

Lessons learnt

Based on the lessons learnt from planning and delivering online workshops and workshops outputs from participants and debrief sessions, we propose a set of principles for designing distributed co-design approaches as follows.

PLANNING EVENTS
Define the appropriate distributed co-design approach and the online platform
- This involves really thinking about the people in the group that you are trying to engage. It is important to know the number of participants and their technical limitations, and set requirements prior online events (e.g. smart phone or computer). Sometimes you just need to phone call or send text or voice messages to keep a session low-tech, or a combination of them in an asynchronous workshop, to avoid broadband issues.

- The platform is analogous of the location of a physical workshop. Sometimes it could be just phone calls, but the online environment is the location where the creative interactions will happen. Some platforms are more appropriate for different size of groups and people. Defining what is right for the context requires studying the technology that people are most comfortable with and then devise bespoke engagement approaches.

Make clear the expectations of online virtual meetings at the beginning
- Start small and try to establish connections: Make people feel comfortable about the virtual environment to let them less worried, concerned and pressured about achieving similar outcomes as physical workshops.

- The attention span of participants in an online workshop is shorter than physical workshops. Devising a distributed multiple light touch over a day or week could enable a better way to keep participants engaged in a project.

DESIGNING CREATIVE INTERACTIONS
- **Think about what interactions are needed to enable creative exchange:** The type of interactions affects the flow of the event. Introducing many new techniques in one session could be overwhelming, requiring extra time to allow participants to familiarise with the platform and to respond to tasks.

- **Get beyond the screen:** Designing activities that make people move around can introduce physical activities and provide fun. Creating these interactions can provide this sense of fun and more human connection in an online session. For example, you can ask participants to find objects related to the activity you are proposing to help them to warm up for what is coming next and to learn basic online interactions, such as turning on/off microphones and video. Ice breakers and coffee breaks are often used to get to know someone better.

- **Design simple activities for tools for remote teams** (e.g. PowerPoint, google docs, Miro): You should limit the instructions to simple tasks, such as listing, sorting, highlighting when using interactive tools. Make sure these instructions are visible to participants when they are responding to a task. A programme guide is important to enable better creative online exchange and interactions. This could help to reduce anxiety towards the completion of the task and use of technology (e.g. Miro and Mural have a sidebar showing the steps to be taken in a task). A facilitator in each break out room might be required to assure participants are doing right.

- **Break down creative interactions** in different windows/spaces to help participants in making sense of activities. For example, you could instruct participants to use video only for discussion and ask the group to agree on who will do what when generating inputs to avoid confusion.

FACILITATING EVENTS
- **Assign co-facilitators roles to team members (Wing person and technical producer):** In physical workshops, a wing person is the one who gives support to the main facilitator, making sure participants understand task and do it right. They might also be taking pictures, handing over proformas, and observe the session as an outsider. A technical producer or director is the one who creates interactive mechanisms to support online sessions, making sure all the digital material and infrastructure are ready to deploy and assist the main facilitator. Technical producers can plan events to work over a day or a week to support participants in co-designing desired outputs with less active facilitation. During online sessions, the wing person could keep the flow and engagement of participants between transitions while a technical producer can prepare the stage for facilitation. A back-up group can support the communicate between the main facilitator and co-facilitators.

- **Role-play the planned ideas:** This is similar to designing a creative facilitation approach for a face-to-face workshop, where an iterative process of planning, prototyping and testing a session would support the improvement of the overall workshop. Running through the online event helps to identify the technical nuances

and issues that might happen during the event. When testing your online event, invite your colleagues with the appropriate literacy for your session in order to spot things that could go wrong.

-   **Provide visual cues:** adding cues allow people to navigate easily through the online session by providing points of reference as they work through it. For example, adding a compass to the presentation slide or highlight important parts of it using coloured squares can assist the presenter to indicate an information and enable participants to locate it in the slide, supporting a good flow of the event. Make sure you upload all the materials you will use to keep the event running.

-   **Use mechanisms to understand the mood of participants:** as you will not be able to grasp situation and their body language hints, you can use scales, emojis or creative mechanisms to enable participants to identify their mood during the event. You can explore and encourage the use of the online language, such as Gifs and memes if they are appropriate for the context.

Next steps

This pilot study provided a necessary information for generating a set of principles for designing distributed co-design approaches. The next step is to use this groundwork in a research project, providing more academic weight to enable the dissemination of this new practice.