



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Curating Collaboration: The Experience of Collaborative Innovation in REACT” Working paper 2, December 2013

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Key findings

The paper offers five key pieces of advice

1. *Be open to the skills and expertise of your collaborators.*

Professional identities have a strong hold in shaping how participants approach collaborations and what they expect to be contributing. Training and experience in a particular background, such as in academia, or creative industries, leads to distinctive professional identity. But what is exhilarating in collaboration is the reconfiguration, contestation and performance of these identities to produce a way of working that is not always possible solely in the worlds of business or academia. Successful collaborations are built on fluid professional identities that extend far beyond received wisdom about Knowledge Exchange where academics bring ‘content’ in the form of academic research and creative businesses operate as a ‘delivery’ service that deploys technology to share that content.

2. *Create protected space.*

Quality of attentions is a key part of the REACT Sandbox methodology. High quality inputs, one-to-one attention and varied inputs all contribute to the provision of a high quality R&D space. Successful collaborations occur in a setting that gives both time and opportunity to work together; this is constituted as a protected space in which expertise, mentorship, advice and expertise are available. The care with which this space is generated creates a high quality, special, experience for the participants.

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3. *Collaboration is a journey.*

Collaboration, especially rapid collaboration, is an emotional process. But this experience adds value, ownership and energy to projects. Collaborative work is a journey that involves a series of experiences and interactions that build trust. This is not always an easy process, and the result is a high level of role exchange and dialogue. The outcome of that journey might not always be apparent during the process; it may not make sense until the end.

4. *Curate people as much as projects.*

The space offered by collaborative work cultivates embodied skills, personal dispositions and acknowledges emotions. It is important not to assume specific approaches of participants as a consequence of their institutional or disciplinary affiliation. It might be assumptions about how they will work, what they will do, or how they may contribute. 'Creativity' doesn't reside in a job description. Curating this process requires the expertise of creative producers who are managers of talent, theme leaders and also empathetic creative individuals in their own right.

5. *Recognise your own fingerprints.*

Curation is an important process but it is not neutral. Although holding space and looking after projects is key, you must continue to recognise that you are bringing your own assumptions and way of doing things to a space. This will inform how collaborations unfold because it sets the parameters to what they are expected to achieve, and what they think they are expected to achieve. Being able to recognise and respond to the needs of your collaborations will help ensure that the process of ideas generation and growth is supported and tailored to the needs of the individuals and collaborations. In this environment the best of all collaborators has a chance to emerge and develop. Furthermore, where your processes, be they administrative, legal, contractual or organisational, interfere with any of the above, they may have a damaging impact on the relationships you are building. Be reflexive about your methods. Organisational self-awareness is important in order to understand the consequences of methods, and to make sure the methods can adapt where necessary.

About this paper

The purpose of this paper is to offer an insight into the experience of collaborative projects in knowledge exchange processes that engage University researchers with creative businesses. Through a series of observations and interviews with collaborators from REACT's first two funding calls, Heritage Sandbox and Books and Print Sandbox, this paper investigates how professional identities, personal experiences and curation interplay in collaborative R&D and offers some recommendations for those seeking to run similar projects.

Guiding questions

This research has been informed by the following framing questions.

- 1) How has collaboration been experienced by our Sandbox participants?
- 2) What are the partners bringing to the collaboration in terms of approaches, skills or knowledges?
- 3) What role does REACT play in supporting or limiting the experience of collaboration?

4) What are our responsibilities in undertaking this kind of work?

About REACT Hub

The REACT Hub is a four year project, established to support collaborative work between Arts and Humanities researchers working in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and businesses in the creative sector. The project is not an isolated initiative, but one of four hubs established by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to explore knowledge exchange in this field. Each hub has its own aims, objectives and methods to conduct this exploration. The Hubs are situated within a landscape where policy makers, and particularly the UK's Business Innovation and Skills Department (BIS), are looking for methods to promote business growth in the creative economy, where academic researchers are being compelled to disseminate and prove the impact of their research outside of the academic audience of their peers, and HEIs are looking for ways to exploit the social and commercial opportunities that this research could offer.

REACT is operating at the intersection of agendas to generate wealth, demonstrate impact, and help develop models for HEIs to better understand both the value of their own researchers, and also the systems needed to work with the microbusiness and SMEs that comprise the creative industries.