

Module 17: Championing Change Management

Assignment 17.1: Reflecting on Partnerships in Technology Leadership

Ravi Bhushan Konduru (Shan Konduru)

Reflection on Past Partnership Experiences

- Description of a Key Partnership

*Imagine Vedic Metaverses formed a partnership with **Unity Technologies**, a company known for its real-time 3D development platform. This partnership was an in-kind arrangement where Unity provided licenses for its software and technical support to the Vedic Metaverses' team of technologists and developers. The goal was to develop a high-fidelity, interactive virtual reality (VR) experience of a major ancient temple. This VR experience would serve as a flagship product, showcasing the organization's ability to combine cultural preservation with cutting-edge technology.*

- Elements Considered in the Partnership

When establishing this partnership, two key elements were prioritized:

- **Alignment of Mission and Values:** *Vedic Metaverses and Unity both had an interest in using technology for a greater good. Unity's mission includes "democratizing development," which aligns with Vedic Metaverses' goal of democratizing access to knowledge about cultural heritage. This shared vision ensured that both parties were working towards a common, meaningful objective beyond just a transactional exchange.*
- **Access to Critical Resources:** *Vedic Metaverses' critical resources included technological infrastructure and expert human capital. The partnership with Unity directly addressed the need for software, and the technical support provided helped upskill the internal team, fulfilling a need for technological expertise without a large financial outlay.*

- Elements Overlooked

In the rush to get the project started, two important elements were overlooked:

- **Clear Intellectual Property (IP) and Licensing Agreements:** *While the general use of the software was understood, the specifics of who owned the final digital assets and how they could be licensed were not clearly defined. This created ambiguity later when another museum expressed interest in a commercial license for the VR experience. It led to delays and a need for renegotiation, which strained the relationship.*

- **Long-Term Sustainability and Support Plan:** *The partnership's initial focus was on the development phase. There was a lack of a clear plan for ongoing software updates, maintenance, and support for the VR experience after its launch. When a new version of the Unity platform was released, the team struggled to update the experience, which led to compatibility issues and required significant unplanned effort.*

- **Satisfaction with Outcomes**

Overall, the partnership was successful in meeting its primary objective: the development and launch of a stunning VR experience. The project received widespread media attention and significantly boosted the organization's visibility and credibility. The objectives were met, and the experience became a valuable tool for fundraising and community engagement.

However, reflecting on the experience, I would have done two things differently. First, I would have insisted on a comprehensive legal agreement upfront that clearly defined all aspects of IP, licensing, and future use. This would have prevented the later complications and ensured a smoother path for potential revenue generation. Second, I would have created a more detailed long-term plan for the project's sustainability, including a clear roadmap for maintenance and updates, which would have ensured the VR experience remained a valuable asset for years to come without unexpected technical challenges. This experience underscored the importance of not just focusing on the what and the how of a partnership, but also on the after—the long-term operational and strategic considerations.

Application to Future Partnerships

- **Key Considerations for Future Partnerships**

For future partnerships, especially in the context of digital transformation and change management, two main considerations would influence my approach:

Organizational and Cultural Fit: *This is about ensuring the partner's values, work culture, and long-term vision are compatible with ours. A strong cultural fit reduces friction, improves communication, and builds a foundation of trust essential for navigating the complexities of change. For example, a partner that values open-source collaboration would be a better fit for Vedic Metaverses than a company with a highly proprietary mindset.*

Strategic Alignment and Shared Objectives: *The partnership must be more than a transactional relationship; it needs to be a strategic alliance. Both parties must have*

a clear understanding of the shared objectives and how the partnership contributes to their individual strategic goals. This ensures that the collaboration remains a priority for both organizations and that both are committed to the outcomes, not just the process.

- **Action Plan for Network Utilization**

To leverage my personal network for a future partnership, I would follow a structured plan:

- **Engage Key Network Connections:** *I would identify and engage individuals who have direct or indirect connections to the target partner organization. This would include:*
 - **Direct contacts:** *People I know personally who work at or have a relationship with the partner company.*
 - **"Weak ties":** *Individuals in my network who may not be close contacts but who have connections to the partner. These ties can often provide valuable, unbiased insights.*
 - **Subject matter experts:** *Professionals in my network with expertise in digital preservation, VR/AR, or non-profit fundraising, who could provide a third-party endorsement or technical perspective.*
- **Identify Key Brokers and Central Players:** *Within my network, I would identify "brokers" — individuals who connect different groups and have a broad reach — and "central players" — those who hold significant influence or have direct access to decision-makers within the target organization. These individuals are crucial for navigating organizational hierarchies and securing buy-in. I would engage them early to get their feedback and support.*
- **Address Dependencies and Risks:** *I would proactively address potential risks by:*
 - **Pre-Partnership Due Diligence:** *Using my network to gather intel on the partner's internal processes, past collaborations, and potential red flags.*
 - **Risk Mitigation:** *Developing a clear plan for how to manage dependencies. For example, if the partnership relies on a specific technology, I would have a backup plan or an alternative solution identified. I would also clearly define roles and responsibilities in the partnership agreement to minimize misunderstandings.*

- Strategies for Alignment and Success

To ensure goal alignment and address potential resistance to a change initiative, I would employ the following two strategies:

- **Jointly Developed Partnership Roadmap:** *Instead of a unilateral plan, I would advocate for the creation of a **joint roadmap** that outlines shared goals, key performance indicators (KPIs), milestones, and a clear governance structure. This collaborative process ensures both partners have a sense of ownership from the outset. Regular, scheduled meetings to review progress against this roadmap would be critical to maintaining alignment and addressing issues as they arise.*
- **Early and Continuous Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:** *I would start engaging stakeholders from both organizations at the very beginning of the process. This includes not only leadership but also the teams who will be directly impacted by the change.*
 - **Address Resistance:** *To address potential resistance, I would use a multi-pronged communication approach that explains the "why" behind the change, not just the "what." I would highlight the benefits to each group, such as new skills for technologists, wider access to research for historians, and increased community engagement.*
 - **Feedback Loops:** *I would establish formal and informal channels for feedback, such as town hall meetings, one-on-one sessions, and anonymous surveys. This gives people a voice, making them feel heard and part of the process, which is a powerful way to mitigate resistance and build trust.*