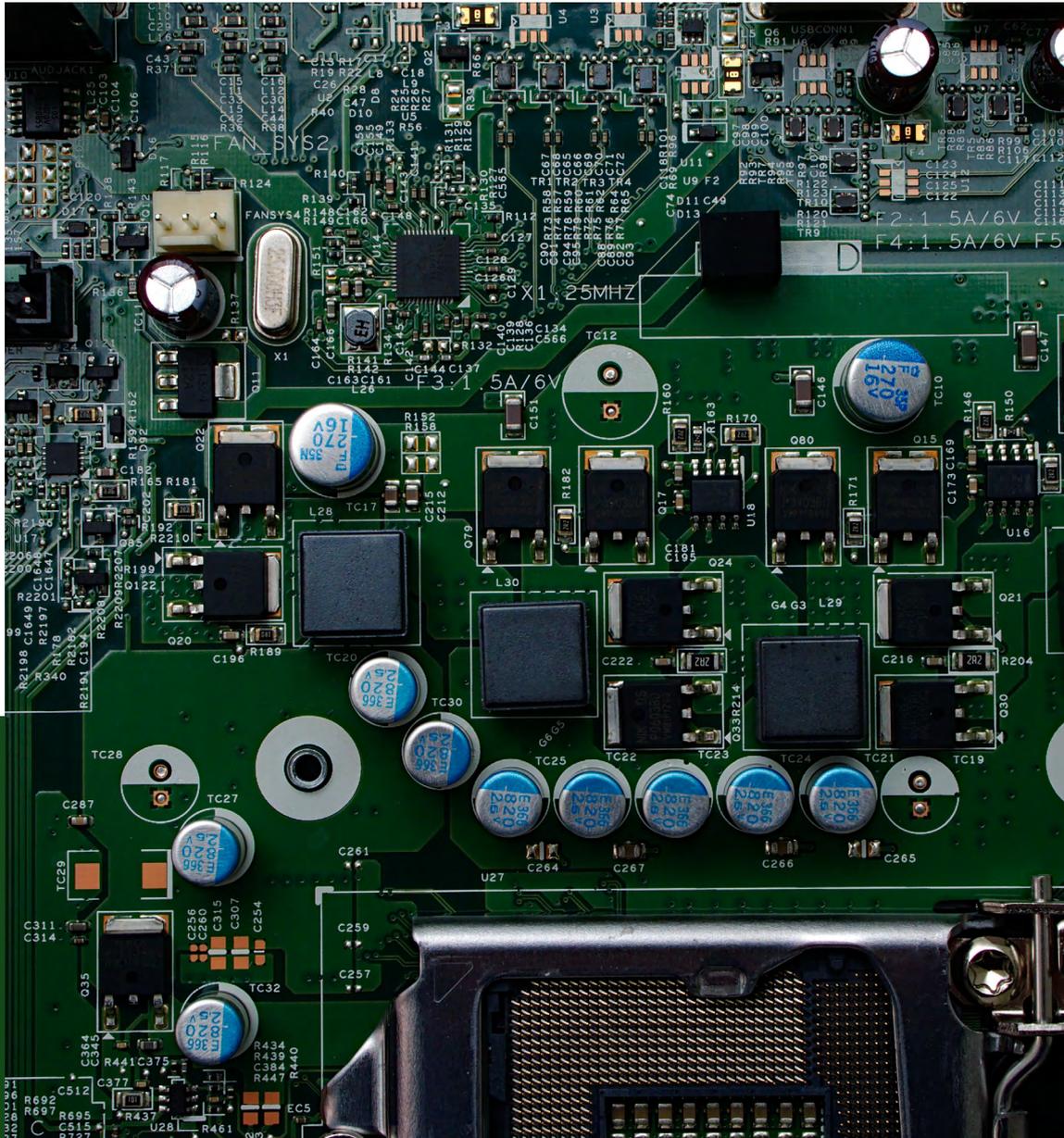


Technology as a Key Driver for Partnerships

ON Research Insights: February 2020



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Edited, reviewed and published by ONResearch, EU Business School

In 2018, amidst some confusion as to the importance of collaboration in the international community, the inaugural edition of the EU Business School Research Forum made a case for public-private partnerships. The research forum explored the various modalities of public-private collaboration in the delivery of global public goods; and served as a knowledge sharing platform for best practices, as well as novel solutions to some of the complex challenges facing the global community. In 2019, this forum re-iterated the need for collaboration through the prism of ‘trust’ as the underlying foundation for institutional interaction. Building on the learnings and insights gained from both editions,

this article explores partnerships from the perspective of programmatic effectiveness and asks what key enablers exist to facilitate said effectiveness.

Global events at the turn of the new decade have highlighted more clearly than ever, the need to maintain a focus on impact in improving lives and livelihoods. This need to ensure sustained focus sheds lights on the ability of international organisations as well as state and other non-state actors, to deliver on their respective mandates, and brings to fore the question on how international organizations can better promote the welfare of the communities that they support and/or work with.



Research Forum 2019, Geneva

Leveraging Synergies for Collaborative Impact

Realising the sensitivities surrounding the rapid advancement of new technologies and the need to carefully consider their applications in various contexts, the EU Business School dedicated the 2019 Research Forum to understanding the role that ‘trust’ plays in these institutional interactions.

For the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), partnerships and collaboration around digital technologies illustrate some important dynamics of trust. An organization created in 1863 with a mandate to protect and assist people affected by conflict, the ICRC works in some of the most complex conflict and humanitarian contexts on the planet. For the ICRC staff, the perception of trust is the cement of

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the access received from and to affected populations. Accordingly, on technologies and partnerships, the ICRC looks beyond simple adoption. It is not just about exploring blockchain, artificial intelligence and the likes, but rather about looking at technologies from the prism of neutrality, independence and confidentiality. In this spirit, ICRC has continued to make significant

investments in scaling up its work around data protection, privacy and digital trust. For instance, the organisation has created an Office for Data Protection in 2014 which lead to the creation of a handbook on data protection in humanitarian action¹; a publication that reflects on the impact of new technologies from a data protection perspective. This approach, which looks beyond

the pure adoption of technology, reminds us that partnerships and collaboration should enhance the ability of organizations to create trust with the people they serve at the local level. Trust is indeed not a given and should be approached as a core element of the analysis of the impact of technologies at the local level.

¹ ICRC, *Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action 2017*, <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/handbook-data-protection-humanitarian-action>, accessed 8th January 2020

The Tech Dimension

Such a focus on impact should drive greater collaboration among international actors because it allows various stakeholders to build on identified synergies with their partners, and leverage capabilities that would otherwise take unavailable time to develop in-house.

The ICRC has also convened several actors to discuss what the organization refers to as the increasingly negative impact and potential risks of new technologies when used in conflict environments, for instance using metadata. In a joint report published by Privacy International and the International Committee of the Red Cross titled ‘The humanitarian metadata problem: Doing no harm in the digital era’, both organisations

explain how metadata could be used by third parties to infer private otherwise private details of users, which in this case is vulnerable populations benefiting from humanitarian aid². This balance between the risks and opportunities present in leveraging new technologies presents an opportunity; it requires new collaborative models in creating solutions that reflect an understanding of innovations and technologies, as well as the contexts in which they can be applied. Academia is well placed to provide value to organizations in search of a safe space to test new ideas and solutions. The ICRC has been for instance extensively working with the Ecole Polytechnique Federale in Lausanne (EPFL) to explore the creation of technologies having privacy at its core.

Leveraging new technologies in the drive to improve lives must be done with caution as well as a sustained focus on improving wellbeing.

As such, interventions must continuously monitor and evaluate impact against rigorous metrics, not only in the short run but also possibly into the

future. Technology is a key driver because of its enabling capabilities, from decision making to implementation.

² ICRC & Privacy International, *The Humanitarian Metadata Problem: Doing No Harm in the Digital Era*, 2018, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/digital-trails-could-endanger-people-receiving-humanitarian-aid-icrc-and-privacy>, accessed 18 Feb 2020

Consider the Impact, Consider the Partner, Consider the Technology

With impact driving the choice of partners and eventually the choice of technologies to be applied in any given context, these are a few guiding principles to consider. Placing trust at the centre of the way technologies are used for and by people affected by crisis;

- 01** Organisations must individually understand their technology better. While international organisations cannot necessarily become experts in individual technologies, a deep understanding is essential to ensure that even through partnerships, the technologies are applied effectively and efficiently
- 02** Up-skilling beneficiaries and ensuring the transfer of capabilities is crucial to programmatic sustainability. Given the exponential nature of technological growth, and the increasing applications of technologies, it is important that beneficiaries are adequately equipped to manage these. Transferring capabilities also means that beneficiaries not only manage solutions in their current state but are also able to adapt and modify these to meet new needs and solve new challenges in the future.
- 03** Localise impact and design solutions based on local assessments of the situation. This is a way to ensure context relevance, avoid misuse and tie programmatic effectiveness directly to the improvement of the lives in said context.
- 04** Ensure the right safeguards are in place such that collaborative efforts continuously consider the risks. Collaborative efforts should consider risks in the present as well as in the future. This ties in with point 2 above. Up-skilled beneficiaries will be able to manage risks in the present but will also be able to identify potential future risks and prepare for these.
- 05** Due diligence, due diligence, due diligence! It is important to find partners that understand the mission and DNA of the respective organisation.

Increased collaboration among businesses, governments, international organisations and the other stakeholders that make up the international landscape would ensure not only that information and learnings are shared on new technologies, but also that investments are effectively channelled into creating and deploying context specific interventions that meet clearly defined needs. The ‘trust’ element must remain an integral part of collaboration because it ensures an approach to technology driven by a focus on impacting individuals and communities positively.

Disclaimer: The opinions and views expressed in this report are of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the ideas and positions of the organizations concerned.