Being a global team leader for me was about being a friend. It was about building trusting relationships between and among teammates. Our focus was to make something we are proud of.

It was difficult at times, especially after the initial meet and greet stage, when it came down to getting on with business and consolidating an idea. When there were lapses in time I had to keep the faith. The time zone differences were something to adjust to, along with some member’s lack of internet connection. I was used to my friends who are available to contact pretty much 24/7. 10 days into the competition was the day my heart rate escalated. I felt as though our communication channel was just this one way stream of myself putting ideas out and asking questions and giving information, with nothing in return. I remember thinking to myself, I either do nothing and wait or keep trying. So I kept trying, offering some individual encouragement and one-on-one communications. By the end of the night I had interactions from 6/7 teammates happy to offer knowledge and participate. It almost seemed too good to be true and I was feeling over the moon, the exact opposite to what I had felt that morning. So I guess that is when I learnt you have to stay positive and keep reaching out because the project appears quite daunting for all members involved and you honestly do get out what you put in. That anxious feeling gave me the inertia to step up and keep trying. What didn’t work when it came to leading was being too ambiguous with the questions and information I posed to the group (possibly why I wasn’t getting response). I found by refining my posts and making every piece of communication a singular idea/piece of information, generated more response and interaction from the team.

Luckily enough all team members made solid contributions to the project, so all 8 of our names appear as authors, which makes me so happy.

Skype proved very successful, this was the place where we consolidated an idea within a 2 hour skype call. The only challenge was finding a time to suit everyone which we tried our best to accommodate. Facebook was a great basecamp and that accountability of being online and being seen was invaluable. I also think, being able to physically see who you are talking to (putting a face to a name) made it a more positive experience and closer to a face-to-face meeting. Having WhatsApp as a supplement communication channel suited our Rwandan and Nigerian team members Peace, Engraim and Babu, because it is cheaper for them to access than Facebook. This was good because it created a more constant communication channel between us, better than what Facebook could offer. At the same time it meant communication was sometimes fragmented with passing on Facebook information to WhatsApp and meant for Peace, Engraim and Babu they were not able to regularly view the links posted to the Facebook page.

I have also learnt to value the process of sharing any and all ideas. Before this contest I was guilty of being that person too scared to offer up an idea if I wasn’t fully into it, but because people can be so scared to say anything, thinking it’s not good enough; you end up with little discussion. In sharing anything it allows everyone to bounce off each other and feel at ease to share any of their ideas.

The internet is a powerful tool, it has allowed our team to meet and work together something unimaginable 30 years ago. I was surprised how connected my teammates were to the internet and this opposed my perception of what I thought internet use and access was like in countries such as Indonesia.

The project definitely got my marketing brain thinking about implementing marketing communications with little to no money. This was an enjoyable and highly creative process for me. It also challenged the way I thought about generating profitability. In some ways that was a challenge for our team and we did end up taking quite a general approach to that profitability factor but we were happy to accomplish the challenge of meeting profitability in year 1 in the first place.

To sum it all up, I learnt that leadership is about having a constant channel of communication and keeping everyone in the loop. This eased the pressure and stress people felt for finishing by the completion date, simply through constant communication. Additionally, I became more of a believer in small things opening up bigger ideas (like a key opening a house). All it took was little encouragements, one-on-ones and answering questions to unlock the big, creative, intelligent minds of the team.