Where Lie the Similarities and Differences?

A Comparison of University and Industry Partners in Collaboration

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Introduction

As forms of knowledge transfer and mobilization, university–industry partnerships are more common on the science side of campus. As a result, the benefits to each group are well understood and articulated (Garrett-Jones, Turpin, Burns, & Diment, 2005; Ramos-Vielba, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, & Woolley, 2016). Further, these partnerships have a common understanding of ways to work together because of a long history of doing so (Sa, September 12, 2019). This stands in contrast to the situation within the social sciences and humanities where little is known about these types of partnerships (Olmos-Peñuela, Castro-Martínez, & D'Este, 2014). This is in part because the research within these disciplines cannot be easily defined as having social-economic benefits and researchers' work is not often geared to industry's purposes (Cassity & Ang, 2006; Pitman & Berman, 2009; Sofoulis, 2011). In addition, a focus on commercializable activities —such as patents, licensing opportunities, and direct technology transfer—tends to hide most of the knowledge transfer activities from these disciplines, which tend to be more informal in nature (D'Este & Patel, 2007; Hughes, Kitson, Probert, & Milner, 2011; Olmos-Peñuela, Molas-Gallart, & Castro-Martínez, 2014). Regardless of the types of activities undertaken within these

partnerships, governments and funding agencies are supporting them as forms of knowledge transfer and production (Phillips, 2009; SSHRC, 2015).

Research suggests that these collaborators want different things from the partnership. Industry's benefits include innovation, new products, technology and knowledge creation, and access to skills, equipment, and knowledge (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Barnes, Pashby, & Gibbons, 2002; Kaymaz & Eryiğit, 2011; Nielsen, Sort, & Bentsen, 2013; Philbin, 2008; Plewa & Quester, 2007). At the same time, academics desire opportunities to access research funds, equipment, and student training, and commercialize research results (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Chedid & Teixeira, 2018; Kaymaz & Eryiğit, 2011; Owens, John, & Bllunt, 2017; Philbin, 2008). The process by which each party realizes its benefits must be carefully negotiated and managed.

This raises several questions about these relationships and ways to manage them. Are there similarities and differences in perspectives between the two parties around benefits, challenges, measures of success, and intended outcomes? What do these look like? It is important to understand these so each party can ensure that the other understands their perspective as the partnership undertakes the necessary upfront work to establish itself. This knowledge about the other creates trust upon which a foundation to a successful partnership can be built (Plewa et al., 2013).

This paper begins to contribute to this discussion by exploring the experience of a university–industry partnership within the humanities between researchers, libraries, and academic-adjacent organizations with a focus on open social scholarship. It builds on research examining the industry partners and researchers' perspectives individually (L. Siemens & INKE Research Group, 2019a, 2019b).

Literature Review

University–industry partnerships take a variety of forms and provide a way for technology and knowledge to be transferred from the university to firms (Barbolla & Corredera, 2009; Muscio & Vallanti, 2014). These can range from formal activities, such as joint research projects, contract research and consulting, to more informal ones, such as advice and networking at conferences and meetings (Bruneel, D'Este, & Salter, 2010; Chedid & Teixeira, 2018; D'Este & Patel, 2007; Kauppila, Mursula, Harkonen, & Kujala, 2015; Perkmann et al., 2013). These types of projects can include problem solving, technology development, ideas testing, and knowledge generation (Perkmann & Walsh, 2009).

An important step to negotiating a successful partnership is finding where aligned values lie. Some researchers liken this process to courtship and marriage (Owens et al., 2017; Perkmann, King, & Pavelin, 2011; Sofoulis, 2011). Sofoulis (2011) suggests that there are three stages. The first phase focuses on courtship, or "getting to know each other," before subsequent stages lead to the articulation of a "prenuptial agreement" and then ultimately "marriage" where the research is undertaken. As a result, Perkmann et al. (2011) suggest that this relationship must be entered into willingly so each party is in agreement around the benefits that will be gained. This creates a rationale for working together, allowing for choice on whether to enter the relationship. Building on this, a need exists for all parties to talk in order to get to know each other and build a strong foundation for success (Cassity & Ang, 2006).

In another perspective, Plewa et al. (2013) argue that there are five phases to developing a university–industry partnership:

Prelinkage (where there is a focus on articulating potential projects and finding the right people/partners to participate)

Establishment (where there are discussions regarding mutual interests and strengths, and expectations for the project, which leads to an articulation of roles and responsibilities and outline of work to be accomplished)

Engagement (where the work is actually conducted and completed)

Advancement (where both parties consider the possibility of an ongoing relationship)

Latent stage (where there are no formal projects but a potential for future cooperation and continuing relationship should a project appear exists).

While they suggest that the main focus should be on all of the middle three phases, the second phase is crucial for establishing trust among the parties (Bruneel et al., 2010). Establishing open communication channels means that each party can develop an understanding of the other, something needed to establish the foundation for trust and minimize potential barriers that impact on the partnership's success. This stage is the time to assess the participating collaborators' skills, personalities, and potential for compatible competencies and capabilities (Bruneel et al., 2010; Nemati-Anaraki & Heidari, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2013; Philbin, 2008; Roshani, Lehoux, & Frayret, 2015). With this basis and before undertaking the actual research, the partnership can articulate the types of activities to be completed along with common goals and milestones

(Philbin, 2008). This is accomplished by having the collaborators talk to each other to find common language and ways of working together (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Cassity & Ang, 2006; Nielsen et al., 2013; Owens et al., 2017; Roshani et al., 2015).

Case Study

This partnership is part of the Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) research. It builds on earlier work that explored the nature of books, e-books, and the future of reading (R. G. Siemens et al., 2009). The present phase is exploring open social scholarship by focusing on the advancement, understanding, and resolution of "crucial issues in the production, distribution and engagement of digital scholarship in Canada" (INKE, 2014a) to facilitate "open access to research, open datasets of academic and government material, and open educational resources" (INKE, 2020). This partnership is working towards funding through Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Partnership Grant program which mandates the involvement of partners, especially those from industry (SSHRC, 2015). Building on initial meetings starting in 2014 (INKE, 2014b), it involves researchers and partners, including libraries and academic-adjacent organizations, in discussion about open social scholarship and ways to advance it within Canada and beyond. The funding would facilitate seven years of research and outreach[1].

Methodology

Through semi-structured interviews, researchers and industry partners were asked about their experiences within the collaboration. The interviews were conducted primarily through Skype and in-person sessions. Each lasting about half an hour, the interviews focused on open-ended questions that explored the understanding of the nature of the collaboration, its associated advantages and challenges, measures of success, and desired outcomes. These interviews allowed the researcher to explore topics more fully and deeply with probing follow-up questions while participants reflected on their own experiences and emphasized those issues that were important to them.

Data analysis involved a grounded theory approach that focused on the themes that emerge from the data. This analysis was broken into several steps. First, working from audio recordings and detailed notes, the data was organized, read, and coded to determine categories, themes, and patterns. These categories were then tested for emergent and alternative understandings, both within a single interview and across all interviews. This was an iterative process, involving

movement between the data, codes, and concepts, constantly comparing the data to itself and the developing themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Findings

As seen in Table 1, similarities and differences in perspectives between university and industry partners exist.

Collaboration[2]

Both groups have similar understandings of collaboration with a focus on individuals and/or groups working towards common interests and goals. However, there were some nuanced differences in perspectives. Industry partners recognize that a collaboration is stronger than working on one's own. Further, they realized that a partnership brings together different perspectives to common research goals. The university researchers remarked that this organizational form was a decentralized way to bring parties together for two-way conversations. This is in contrast to the more typical one-way discussions where researchers communicate their findings outward with little opportunity for interaction.

Benefits

Benefits achieved through the collaboration was one area where clear differences existed between the two groups. Industry was primarily focused at an organizational level. They were interested in extending professional networks, raising the profiles of participating organizations, and learning from each other. In contrast, university researchers were more attuned to practically oriented research benefits with a movement from research to implementation and the ability to combine industry's applied orientation with more blue-sky thinking. This led to a desire for tool and prototype development through which researchers could gain access to audiences with whom industry partners have contact.

Challenges

There existed some common challenges. First, both parties realized that challenges that flow from the differing perspectives, ways of working, and vocabulary must be managed. Second, writing a grant that has agreement from all members of the collaboration presented issues through which to work. This was further complicated by the fact that ways to move everyone along in the same direction that was supported and understood needed to be found. Both par-

ties agreed that they needed to learn from each other in order for the partnership to be successful. To this end, industry had to develop ways to think like an academic while university researchers realized that this was not a natural way for them to work and took some negotiation to be successful.

Other similarities in challenges around partnership membership existed. Industry partners highlighted that the turnover of representatives and the distance between them may impact the partnership's success. At the same time, university collaborators focused on the fact that the right partners needed to be located for a successful collaboration. Further, resources to sustain the collaboration were highlighted. Industry was focused on locating resources in a constrained environment whereas university partners recognized the need for resources that will sustain a collaboration when everyone is busy.

Differences between the two were seen on a practical level. Industry wanted to see a change in perspective over their roles in the grant. This meant a move from seeing their role as solely research support and production to one of research itself. Even more practically grounded, university zeroed in on the need for tenure and promotion and obtaining support from local institutions as challenges. They also raised concerns about the need for academic freedom.

Measures of success and intended outcomes

In terms of measures of success, this was another area where some similarities and differences existed between the two groups. First, both groups looked to soft measures of success. Both industry and university wanted to impact and influence policy over issues of open access and publishing, including Tri-council[3] guidelines on the topic. At the same time, industry collaborators wanted to develop a meaningful role for them in the grant application that created the ability to spin off new tools that had an impact on the discipline, networks, and beyond. University researchers also looked to a move towards production with ways to mobilize and fully implement research. At a more abstract level of difference, the researchers articulated a desire that consensus was reached, the areas of common agreement were well articulated, and future projects were envisioned. And practically speaking, the university members again looked to concrete signs of success such as publications, presentations, funding, and tenure and promotion.

In terms of intended outcomes, both groups remained general and non-specific with a focus on a larger discussion. Both wanted the ability to advocate on related issues and influence discussion and decision makers about policies regarding open social scholarship. Further, university researchers wanted to bring attention to ideas that were important to others at the national and international levels and create consensus around research and issues related to knowledge

mobilization and translation. The industry partners desired to see new services with the potential to improve their core activities while creating new ways of thinking, advancing the understanding of scholarship, and facilitating new research on infrastructure, platforms, and tools. University collaborators also wanted to see product development and experimentation with industry partners to create new tools. In terms of differences, researchers again had a practical orientation where the deliverables and needs of each party were met. Further, they wanted to see that the partnership met the core principles of community-engaged scholarship with its open access to knowledge and information. In this way, academics would be able to see themselves as members in larger society.

Resources

With regards to resources, the difference between each group was a matter of scale. Industry provided in-kind resources such as travel and staff time, infrastructure, tools, software, and different perspectives while university contributed time, ability to conduct research, academic skills and perspectives, and tools to accomplish what each group desired. The university members also contributed some cash and access to students and created opportunities to undertake some types of activities that might not have been possible otherwise. They provided emotional energy to keep the research moving forward recognizing that research activities were only one of the partners' responsibilities. Finally, they served on partner boards and steering committees, which provided opportunity to influence open scholarship discussion.

	Industry	**University**	**Same**
Understanding of Collaboration	Stronger than individuals working alone	Decentralized way of approaching problems in a two-way communication	Focus on individuals/groups working to common interest and goals
Benefits	Extend networks; Raise profile of organizations; Learn from each other	Movement from research to implementation; Ability to combine applied approach with blue-sky thinking; Access to other audiences	
Challenges	Movement towards research, rather than research support; Find time for meetings, resources, and projects that contribute in a constrained environment	Need for tenure and promotion; Getting local support; Issues of academic freedom	Different perspectives, ways of working, vocabulary; Writing a grant that keeps everyone on the same page;

			Need to learn from each other; Partner concerns; Need for resources
Measures of success	Meaningful role in grant; Ability to create spinoff tools that impact discipline, network and beyond	Publications, presentations, and tenure and promotion; Move to production of tools and strategies; Reach consensus and envision further projects	Influence policy and decision makers
Desired outcomes	Implementation of new services with potential to improve core activities of partners; New ways of thinking while advancing the understanding of scholarship	Deliverables to meet the needs of each involved party; Product development and experimentation with partners leading to tools; Meet core principles of community-engaged scholarship and open access to knowledge	Ability to advocate and influence policy
Resources	In-kind resources	Cash funding and access to students; Freedom to pursue research; Ability to participate in partner boards to influence direction; Emotional energy	In-kind resources (travel, staff time, tools, infrastructure, lab equipment)

Table 1 – Comparison of university–industry partners' perspectives

Discussion

As outlined in earlier papers, (L. Siemens & INKE Research Group, 2019a, 2019b), this partnership is still in its early phases. However, some initial conclusions can be made around comparisons between the university and industry partners. Common understandings of the above factors exist and establishes a foundation for trust and working together.

As a starting point, both groups have the same understanding of collaboration, which provides a basis for the research and a good foundation for the partnership. The divergence can begin to be seen in the benefits, challenges, measures of success, desired outcomes, and resources. First, in terms of benefits, it is clear that the two groups have clearly different desires, which is understandable. Each party is focused on getting something different from the relationship. Industry desires benefits at the organizational level whereas university members are more practically oriented with a focus on research implementation and access to audiences. As a result, it

is important to manage these differences. These somewhat intangible benefits also reinforce the difference between science-oriented partnerships versus humanities-based ones. Science partners are focused more on more measurable benefits such as access to technologies, patents, licenses, and employees (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Barnes et al., 2002; Lee, 2000; Plewa & Quester, 2007) with university researchers seeking to gain research funds, advance research, and create opportunities for students—again, tangible results (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Lee, 2000; Ramos-Vielba et al., 2016). Regardless of the type of partnership, benefits must exist for both industry and university in order for both parties to participate (Philbin, 2008).

There also were some similarities around challenges. For example, each group recognized that the presence of different perspectives, ways of knowing, and vocabulary could cause issues. By knowing these in advance, the partnership can find ways to minimize their potential impact and even harness them to create project success. However, there are some articulated differences that could cause some tension. To this end, industry partners need to be aware of the very practical challenges faced by the academics who need tenure, promotion, and academic freedom to conduct their research.

As members of the collaboration, the two groups must also be aware of their unique measures of success and find similarities while managing differences. To this end, opportunity to combine voices to influence policy and decision makers in terms of open social scholarship exists with the potential to have an impact. At the same time, academics take a very practical approach with needed measures of success. As was explored in challenges, university partners need publications, presentations, and funding with an eye to tenure and promotion. There is no escaping this need and industry partners must ensure that proposed research activities meet this requirement. Otherwise, university collaborators may limit their involvement.

There are some similarities and differences between the two sets of partners with regards to desired outcomes. First, like measures of success, both parties are focused on lobbying decision makers on key issues. They are also interested in the development of new tools. At the same time, the university collaborators bring a practical eye to the outcomes. They want to ensure that the needs of each party are met.

This research shows an understanding of the similarities and differences in the ability to provide resources. Unlike science-based collaborations where industry partners potentially have more of a capacity to contribute cash (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Owens et al., 2017; Philbin, 2008), here industry partners indicated that they could only contribute in-kind resources in the form of time for travel and staff, infrastructure, tools and software, and their differing perspectives due to limited budgets. In terms of the researchers, beyond in-kind resources, they are able

to provide cash from internal research grants and through students who work on the projects. They can provide foundational capacities, skills, and emotional energy in the form of the time, ability, and knowledge to carry out the research projects themselves. For both groups, however, the majority of cash funding for the proposed research initiatives will come from the grant.

As this research suggests, there must be an understanding of the similarities and differences so that the partnership can build the foundation of trust needed to undertake joint projects (Olmos-Peñuela, Castro-Martínez, et al., 2014). As a result, the collaborators must develop a common language and commit to each other, the project, and the outcomes to ensure mutual benefits (Barnes et al., 2002; Cassity & Ang, 2006; Phillips, 2009; Plewa et al., 2013). The two parties need to understand each other in order to manage the relationship and ensure research success (Barnes et al., 2002; Cassity & Ang, 2006; Plewa et al., 2013; Ramos-Vielba et al., 2016). To do this, it takes time, space, and regular communication to negotiate (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015; Phillips, 2009; Ramos-Vielba et al., 2016). This collaboration has been doing so through yearly partner gatherings and other meetings for over five years (L. Siemens & INKE Research Group, 2019a).

Given that this project is at the beginning of funded research, it remains to be seen if this partnership will be able to collaborate. Regardless, a better understanding of the similarities and differences across a variety of factors can become the starting point for co-operation. Building on Plewa et al. (2013) who argues that more attention should be placed on the earlier phases of a university–industry partnership, the second phase with its focus on the establishment of the partnership is important to gain understanding of these factors between the two sets of partners to ensure an appropriate foundation for success.

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Notes:

. Since the writing of this paper, INKE has received grant funding from SSRHC for seven years of research and outreach. ↩

. More information about the industry partners and university researchers' individual perspectives can be found in Siemens, L. and INKE Research Group, 2019 a, b. ↩

. The tri-council includes the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Canadian Institute for Health Research. ↩

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Abstract:

University–industry partnerships are common on the science side of campus where ways to work together are well understood. This is less so in the humanities even as these types of collaborations are being funded by granting agencies and governments. For these partnerships to build a foundation for success, common understandings around issues of the nature of collaboration, benefits, challenges, measures of success and outcomes need to exist. Using Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) as a study case, this research examines a humanities-based partnership to understand similarities and differences in partners' perspectives around these factors. Overall, the university and industry partners have common understandings of the nature of collaboration, the potential challenges facing the collaboration, and desired outcomes and success factors. However, there are some differences that must be navigated to ensure collaboration success. These focus on the benefits, the role of industry partners, need for tenure and promotion for researchers, and the type of resources that each can provide. While the partnership is in early stages of research, it has had the opportunity to learn about each other and differing perspectives by working and meeting together for over five years. This is the first step to creating a foundation of trust upon which a successful collaboration can be built.

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