Building and Supporting Humanities-Based University–industry Partnerships

View from the Academics

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Introduction

University–industry partnerships are rare on the humanities side of campus in contrast to the sciences (Garrett-Jones et al. 2005, Ramos-Vielba, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, and Woolley 2016). This is partly because the research in the sciences can be more easily monetized into social-economic benefits, something desired by industry (Pitman and Berman 2009). Consequently, university and industry partners already have common ground upon which they can work together to the benefit of both parties. Technology transfer and research commercialization are the result (Barbolla and Corredera 2009). In contrast, within humanities-based collaborations, rather than working with commercial firms, partners tend to be governments and not-for-profit organizations, such as libraries and museums, which have an interest in cultural impacts (Pitman and Berman 2009, Owens, John, and Bllunt 2017). Regardless of the nature of the collaboration and partners, these initiatives are a form of knowledge production and transfer and are supported by government and funding agencies (Cassity and Ang 2006, Phillips 2009, Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, SSHRC 2015).

Given this context, several questions arise, particularly within the humanities context. How do researchers perceive the benefits of collaborations between academics and industry? What do they see as challenges? How do they measure success and define outcomes? What resources do they bring to the table?

This paper contributes to this discussion with an exploration of the Implementing New Knowledge Environments: Networked Open Social Scholarship (INKE:NOSS), a humanities-based partnership between several universities, libraries, and academic-adjacent organizations. This work builds on research from the partner perspective (Siemens and INKE Research Group 2019).

Literature review

University–industry partnerships are a way for technology and knowledge to be transferred from the university[1] to industry (Barbolla and Corredera 2009, Muscio and Vallanti 2014), often in the form of one university working with one company (Barbolla and Corredera 2009). The term university–industry partnership is a broad one and can encompass many different types of activities, ranging from information sharing, meetings and conferences, consultancy and contract research, creation of physical facilities and training programs, licenses and patents, and finally, joint research initiatives and ventures (D'Este and Patel 2007, Bruneel, D'Este, and Salter 2010, Kauppila et al. 2015, Chedid and Teixeira 2018).

Many reasons for participating in these relationships exist. At a practical level, academics can access research funds, equipment, and training opportunities for students, postdoctoral fellows, and early career scholars (Philbin 2008, Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Owens, John, and Bllunt 2017, Chedid and Teixeira 2018). There is also opportunity for new knowledge creation and technical applications (Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015). On a more abstract level, academics gain the opportunity to commercialize their research and enhance their and the university's reputation with new research ideas and publications (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Franco and Haase 2015, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015, Chedid and Teixeira 2018).

At the same time, industry can be exposed to innovation that allows the company to improve their sales and competitive edge and create new products (Philbin 2008, Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011). Companies can also access skills, equipment, and knowledge to which they might not have had otherwise (Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015). Ultimately, benefits must exist for both industry and the researcher

(Philbin 2008). These benefits can be formal and easy to measure with patents, research papers, licensing agreements, spin offs, and problems that have been solved. On a more informal level, which is harder to quantify but no less important, these include conferences, workshops, consultations, and qualified employees (D'Este and Patel 2007, Bruneel, D'Este, and Salter 2010, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015).

Alongside these benefits and motivations for participating, several barriers exist that can hamper the partnership's success. First, each side may not know about the other and their capabilities. Often, the university does not make such information about researchers and their research expertise well known. In response, industry works to ascertain this through conference attendance, faculty profiles that are posted, and research agendas. Knowledge of patterns of collaboration can facilitate the exchange of information about the other (Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011, Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015). Second, a lack of a common language along with different ways of working and understanding of desired outcomes exist (Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015, Owens, John, and Bllunt 2017, de Wit-de Vries et al. 2018). Legal issues and contractual mechanisms around intellectual property rights may be another issue as well as the policy and regulations that support these collaborations (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015). The relative geographical proximity to each other may also hamper the relationship (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015); the farther the distance apart, the more coordination is needed. In their study of the Italian context, Musico and Vallanti (2014) found that some barriers that can reduce the frequency of these types of partnerships include the lack of alignment of incentives between the university and industry and the need to make the interaction between academics and industry easier. Different incentive systems exist where researchers tend to be more concerned with publications while industry might be more focused on technology commercialization (Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013). Trust between parties can reduce these barriers and create strong links (Bruneel, D'Este, and Salter 2010).

While there are many benefits to these partnerships, they are optional for academics. However, there may be pressure to participate due to government and institutional policies (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015). The researcher's involvement depends on incentives, perceived benefits, and costs of the partnership (Muscio and Vallanti 2014). Several drawbacks from the academic perspective exist. As Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa (2015) argue, these drawbacks may include a potential threat to research autonomy and investment in long-term research and the nature of confidential agreements that can make it harder to publish, and the possibility that short-term contracts will lead academics to become an extension of industry. Further, they suggest that these

collaborations could create a focus on applied research over basic research. There might also be conflicts between university and industry over the release of possible negative results, something not found in the humanities given the type of research conducted. And of course, building from these drawbacks, the potential negative impact on prestige and reputation can suggest to an academic that these types of collaborations may be less than desirable (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Ramos-Vielba, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, and Woolley 2016).

After consideration of the potential benefits and challenges, university and industry can find ways to come together in partnership, a process that tends to work through stages. Generally, the first stage focuses on mapping the terrain and collecting information about industry requirements and identifying where research is needed and the parties available to do the work. There is also an evaluation of whether there are compatible cultures, complementary competencies, and a clear agenda for working together (Philbin 2008, Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015, Nemati-Anaraki and Heidari 2016). The various members of a potential university–industry team learn about each other and any pre-existing relationships. Contact is made with potential partners who then evaluate the strategic interests of each other and determine real and potential capabilities (Bruneel, D'Este, and Salter 2010, Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, Nemati-Anaraki and Heidari 2016). Owens (2017) describes this process as steps towards "tying the knot." From there, the researcher and a company determine concretely the type of work that might be done, the nature of the collaboration, stated objectives, common goals, milestones, and the value to each party. The next step is to create and sign a statement of work and contract, while managing expectations. Next, the research and technology transfer is actually accomplished (Philbin 2008, Nemati-Anaraki and Heidari 2016). Finally, both parties decide whether the collaboration met its goals and evaluate the potential of undertaking another project (Philbin 2008). While there has been little exploration of this process in the humanities, it is likely that it is the same as with the sciences, though further research is needed.

Building on Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret's (2015) observations, several factors that support success can be articulated. It is important to note that success is dependent on whose perspective is being considered and who does the evaluation (Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011). One sign of success is that previous collaborations promote future ones (Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015, p. 11). From the industry perspective, others include project usefulness, company confidence in the university and project results, understanding and coordination between working teams, and use of mature technologies and knowledge (Barbolla and Corredera 2009, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015). For academics, success may include peer-reviewed articles and other similar metrics (Garrett-Jones et al. 2005, Phillips 2009, Ramos-Vielba, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, and Woolley

2016). Several steps must be taken to harness these factors. First, multiple communication channels must be present and a careful consideration of partners must be undertaken. Roles and project outcomes, publication output, and intellectual property rights must be clearly defined. A commitment to collaboration also must be present along with inter-organizational trust. Previous collaboration experiences can be beneficial, though not necessary (Philbin 2008, Barbolla and Corredera 2009, Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015). If any of these are not present, a partnership might not be successful (Barbolla and Corredera 2009). The range of activities to create and support these includes meetings, communications, and mobility and employment opportunities between the university and industry (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015). Ultimately, successful collaborations keep things simple at the beginning, clarify scope, partner mission, and have strong leadership (Kauppila et al. 2015).

Case Study

INKE:NOSS is a partnership that builds on earlier work of INKE, which explored the nature of books, e-books, and the future of reading (Siemens et al. 2009). The INKE:NOSS phase of the partnership is exploring networked 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). The partnership is working towards funding through the 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), INKE:NOSS involves partners, including libraries and academic-adjacent organizations, in discussion about open social scholarship and ways to advance it within Canada and beyond. This partnership is in the process of applying for grant funding to order to pursue the proposed work. The funding would facilitate seven years of research.

Methodology

Though semi-structured interviews, researchers were asked about their experiences as partners within INKE:NOSS. The interviews were conducted primarily through Skype and in-person sessions. 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 reflect on their own experiences and emphasize those issues that are 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[2]. 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 (McCracken 1988, Rubin and Rubin 1995, Marshall and Rossman 1999).

Findings

Overall, the researchers are positive about this partnership. They see value in it as a way to achieve their research goals in collaboration with partners' expectations.

Nature of Collaboration

The interviewees articulated a basic definition of collaboration. As one stated, a collaboration is two or more individuals or groups working together towards both common goals and individual ones that create benefit for each party (AL4)[3]. In these cases, the team members are like-minded people who hold similar goals (AL1). This overlap between research interests and those of the partners around networked open social scholarship can be seen in Figure 1 (AL3).

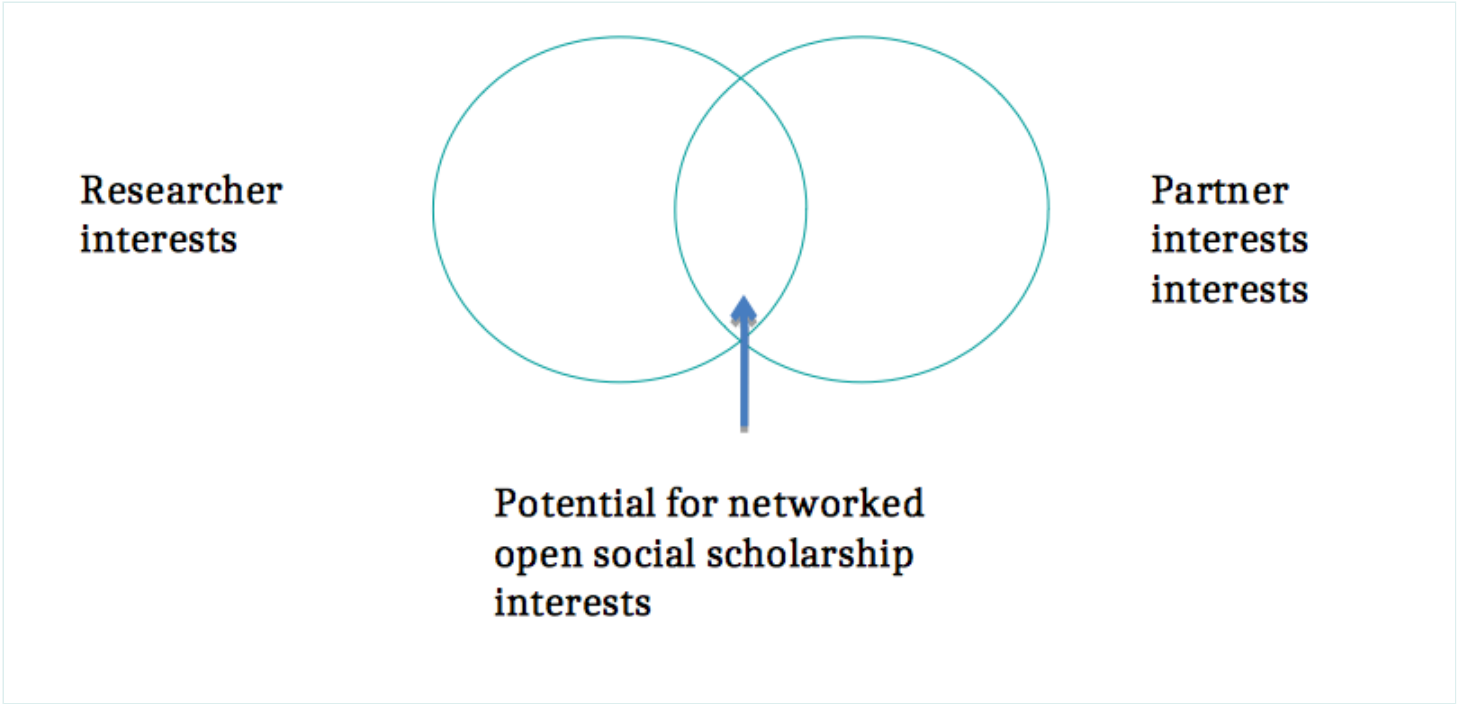

Figure 1: Overlapping research interests

A collaboration of this nature creates a decentralized way of approaching problems by bringing together research interests with industry and public interests in two-way active conversation. This is contrast to the typical way of working with industry where academics often undertake research and then approach industry (AL1). In this case, the relationship is subtle with a focus on co-creation within an engaged stakeholder community (AL3, AL4). There is focus on what each member brings to the partnership (AL3).

Partner Integration

It has taken several years to develop this partnership (AL3). Initial meetings were held once a year with a combination of short talks and speakers and then a half-day meeting that brought a variety of partners to the table. The objective of these gatherings was to create a shared experience and common understanding of mission and mandate and identify ways to work with partners' individual needs, desires, and targeted research interests (AL1, AL3, AL4). Further, these events were an opportunity to show the benefits of the research to the partners (AL4) and create a critical mass of ideas that then set up ways to collaborate together (AL1). Building on the yearly partner meetings, the Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI)[4] served as an additional way to bring together and integrate partners in order to share opportunities that could initiate joint activities. Ultimately, there was a realization that it takes time to develop these personal relationships with ambassadors from the groups that matter, something that is not easily done over email (AL1).

Benefits and Advantages

The interviewees also expressed some benefits and advantages to the partnership. First, there was a feeling that if the partnership worked, there was a possibility to move from research to implementation and production with real life impact (AL3, AL4). While realizing that this is a different world than academics are use to, the partners' applied research orientation could be combined with researchers' blue sky thinking into future directions (AL3). Partners also provided access to a larger audience and user perspective (AL4). Finally, the researchers gave the partners a sandbox of potential ideas that could be integrated with a delivery-orientated mandate of tools and prototypes (AL3).

Challenges

Several challenges were present to the partnership development. Some of these were at a more practical level. Humanities academics were not accustomed to this model due to lack of training in this area (AL1, AL4). There were also potential concerns with academic freedom where industry partners may be looking to get certain things out of the researcher (AL4). Further, partners had different needs and were not necessarily concerned with tenure and promotion, whereas academics, especially early career scholars, needed papers and publications to this end (AL2, AL4). Further, collaborations of this nature took more time and work than being on one's own (AL4). Another interviewee focused on the challenges of finding the right people with whom to work, funding and resources to actually do the work, and ways to sustain the partnership when everyone is busy (AL2). Finally, different patterns of communication created issues that needed to be worked through. Each side had different vocabulary, ways of seeing the world, and cultures. This was one area where the face-to-face meetings provided an opportunity to manage these differences and build a shared culture (AL1)

Interviewees expressed challenges on a larger scale. First, these were associated with different ways of working together and finding ways to move in a direction that everyone understands and accepts given the diversity of researchers, disciplines and partners. This included finding ways to create shared tangible objectives that can be completed even if external financial support does not exist (AL3). Results needed to be articulated in a way that was meaningful for everyone involved, especially the academics (AL2). To that end, compromise was needed when negotiating expectations on both sides (AL1). This interviewee also suggested that the partnership needed to start small and build from there (AL1). Finally, while the funding agency wanted to see these kinds of partnerships and was prepared to fund them, challenges existed at the local level where these may not be as highly valued (AL4).

Measures of success and desired outcomes

In terms of measures of success and desired outcomes, these again were expressed on a practical level and longer term one. At a practical level, measures of success included publications and presentations (AL1, AL2), successful grant funding, and tenure and promotion (AL1). In the longer term, interviewees felt that contributing to expanding tri-council[5] implementation of sustainable open access by creating public access to data and knowledge and sustainable modes of journal publication would be success (AL4). Public engagement included drawing public intellectuals into larger discussions, rather than academics among themselves (AL2). This also included moving from process to production with ways to mobilize research and the ability to fully implement ideas (AL1). Researchers needed to understand the reasons why partners wanted

to enter into this relationship and understand their measures of success (AL1). Ultimately, success meant that the goals of reaching consensus were accomplished and then well-articulated things in areas of agreement were achieved (AL3) and future relationships were envisioned (AL1).

As with measures of success, desired outcomes were separated into the short term, more practically oriented ones, and those that were longer term and more abstract. The interviewees focused on some short-term outcomes. As a starting point, the collaboration needed to ensure that the deliverables met the needs of the parties involved (AL1, AL4). One focus was on the desire to implement a project such as this one to meet the core principles of collaborative work, open access, and right to information and knowledge (AL4). Finally, another outcome dealt with product development embodied through experimentation with partners that ultimately led to tool development (AL3).

At a more abstract longer-term level, interviewees suggested that a desired output involved moving the network related to open social scholarship forward (AL4). One interviewee saw INKE as having a lobbying capacity that could influence decision makers and bring attention to ideas that are important to others at the federal and international levels (AL2). This would be accomplished through the policy observatory[6] that is presently one of the few initiatives speaking to these issues (AL4). Another desired outcome would create a project that met core principles and value these as strengths of the partnership. These principles included the value of community engaged scholarship and open access to information and knowledge. In this context, academics were to be seen as part of society, not separate (AL4). Finally, the partnership would share ideas, reach consensus and come together around research and issues related to knowledge mobilization and translation (AL3).

Resources

The academics brought a variety of resources to the collaboration. At a practical level, academics provided time, ability, and knowledge of ways to conduct research (AL3, AL4) along with access to smart students who would then be mentored by the researchers (AL2, AL4). They also provided lab space, equipment, and their own and institutional research funds, both in-kind and cash (AL1, AL2, AL3).

More abstractly, while needing to publish results, the academics brought certain freedoms to do things along with a research presence, and different expertise and perspectives (AL1, AL4). Collaborations also presented academic tools and skills to accomplish things that both the researcher and partner desire (AL3). One interviewee stated that academics bring a layer of credi-

bility to partner initiatives (AL3). By serving on advisory and steering boards, researchers provided accountability, decision-making, and the potential to envision future directions in open scholarship (AL3). Finally, academics brought emotional energy to the project that kept interest and motivation engaged (AL2).

Wished had known at outset

The interviewees were asked what they wished they had known at the outset of working with partners. One interviewee expressed a desire for mechanisms and methods for making the definition of partner needs more transparent and clearly foregrounding what the partnership would produce. This would in turn lead to a willingness to commit time, students, and cash and in-kind resources (AL4). Another focused on the challenges of constant turnover in representatives from partner organizations. A need to bring them up to speed existed. Further, the new representatives may not have had experience with shared objectives and an understanding of the work that needed to be done to bring them into the partnership (AL3). Finally, there was a desire to have more familiarity with these types of collaboration from the outset given the different ways of thinking, values and implementation between researchers and partners (AL1).

Discussion

As outlined in an earlier paper on the topic of university–industry partnerships in the humanities from the industry perspective (Siemens and INKE Research Group 2019), this collaboration is in its early stages; however, some conclusions can be made. In this case study, the involved organizations and researchers are learning about each other and their expectations and are building towards an articulation of work and desired outcomes (Philbin 2008, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015, Nemati-Anaraki and Heidari 2016). These collaborators are building from past work together, contributing to the partnership's possible success (Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015).

However, humanities collaborations are different from those in the sciences. As Pitman and Berman (2009) highlight in their review of partnerships in the humanities, these tend to have more partners than the science ones, thus requiring more coordination and negotiation. This is not the case of one university to one partner (Barbolla and Corredera 2009), but rather a consortium of partners and universities. These create more diversity and challenges that must be worked through. Further, unlike technology transfer that implies a one-way direction between researchers and industry, this collaboration is built on two-way communication. Here, partners

contribute to the research direction in discussion with the academics with each having input into the end result. As argued by Pitman and Berman (2009), a flow of information between industry and academics must exist. INKE:NOSS accomplishes this with yearly meetings and conversations and emails in between.

This paper gives insight into the academic's perspective. First, given that these partnerships are optional for academics (Muscio and Vallanti 2014), these researchers have determined that the benefits and anticipated results outweigh the challenges. They have joined the collaboration for more than just the potential of research funds and opportunities for students (Philbin 2008, Barbolla and Corredera 2009). Since this is humanities-based collaboration, there is little opportunity for commercialization of results through patents, licensing, and other forms of technology transfer that might result in economic benefit to the partner (Cassity and Ang 2006, Philbin 2008, Pitman and Berman 2009, Kaymaz and Eryiğit 2011, Sofoulis 2011, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Chedid and Teixeira 2018). Instead, these researchers are focused on creating practical application for their research, gaining access to a larger audience, and potentially influencing government policy on open access and networked open social scholarship.

Some similar challenges with those collaborations within the sciences can be seen. Both have different languages and cultures present that must be worked through given the diversity of partners and researchers (Philbin 2008, Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015, de Wit-de Vries et al. 2018). In the case of INKE:NOSS, the yearly meetings with partners prove to be beneficial to this end. These meetings decrease the feeling of distance between collaboration members, thus reducing the need for some types of coordination. Opportunity exists to address these differences and ensure that all members of the collaboration are on the proverbial same page. Some concern about academic freedom was expressed because it was perceived that industry may be looking for research from the academics without reciprocity (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015). There is also some question about the potential lack of alignment around incentives between the researcher and partner. Each party needs to find what they are looking for with the other (Nielsen, Sort, and Bentsen 2013, Muscio and Vallanti 2014). Finally, these interviewees are concerned about the potential lack of publications and conference presentations that pave the road to tenure and promotion.

As with science partnerships, resources that academics bring to the table include students, lab equipment, and some in-kind and cash resources (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015, Roshani, Lehoux, and Frayret 2015) as well as intellectual expertise. In this case, the researchers also participate in partners' boards and steering committees assisting with decision-making and influencing future directions on issues of open social scholarship. Further, they provide the motiva-

tion to keep the research moving forward since it is only part of the partners' organizational priorities.

This paper explores the humanities researchers' view of this type of partnership and compares these experiences of those in science-based partnerships. While some differences between the two exist, these researchers have found that there are benefits and advantages to their participation and ways to negotiate the challenges, like in the sciences. With fingers crossed, the collaboration will be funded and will be able to continue work on network open social scholarship through this university–industry collaboration.

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Notes:

. While the term university is used interchangeably with researcher/academic, it is important to note that industry partners with specific researchers, not the university. The term industry and

business/company are also used interchangeably whereas academics tend to work with a specific company within science-based collaborations. ↩

. Theme is an overarching understanding of the data while category is a collection of similar data as evidenced by patterns. ↩

. Individuals are identified by abbreviation and number with reference to their interview data. ↩

. More information about DHSI can be found at http://www.dhsi.org. ↩

. The Tri-council refers to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and the Canadian Institute for Heather Research (CIHR). ↩

. More information about the policy observatory can be found at https://ospolicyobservatory.uvic.ca. ↩

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Abstract:

University–industry partnerships are rare on the humanities side of campus in contrast to the sciences. As a result, little is known about these partnerships, which tend to be with libraries and other not-for-profit organizations. Using the Implementing New Knowledge Environments: Network Open Social Scholarship (INKE:NOSS) as a case study, this research examines a humanities-based university–industry partnership from the academics' perspective. It explores the nature of the collaboration, associated benefits and challenges, and measures of success and desired outcomes. Overall, building upon several years of working with the partners, the interviewed researchers found that the benefits of collaborating outweighed the challenges. The benefits included the potential to move research towards production-orientated results. Among the many challenges, there was some hesitation about the ability to achieve publications and presentations needed for tenure and promotion. The academics contributed stu-

dents, and in-kind and cash resources from their own research funds and those of the university to the partnership. At this point, the measures of success and desirable outcomes have not been quantified and instead focus on policy intervention and movement towards open social scholarship. These understandings about the nature of such a university–industry collaboration should provide a good foundation if partnership is funded.

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