**SIEMENS — Change**

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**Change, Transition, and Governance: Lessons from a Long-Term, Large-Scale DH Collaboration**

Siemens, L. and the INKE Research Group

Digital humanities (DH) is becoming increasingly a collaborative community of practice, a move encouraged both by the scale, scope, and complexity of projects (L. Siemens and Burr, 2013) and by granting agencies with programs such as Digging into Data (2013); the new Bilateral Digital Humanities Program between the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Office of Digital Humanities and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Germany’s research office (2014); Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council’s Partnership Grants (2013); and many others. This trend is further supported through efforts such as Fair Cite (2012) and the Collaborators’ Bill of Rights (Off the Tracks, 2011) to more fully recognize project contributions through multi-authorship citation practices; University of Virginia’s Praxis Program, which provides collaborative project experience for graduate students (The Praxis Program at the Scholars’ Lab, 2011a; 2011b; 2012; n.d.), and individual DH project charters outlining guidelines for team work (Hjartarson et al., 2011; Ruecker and Radzikowska, 2007).

These are all exciting developments that will reap long-term contributions at the individual, project, and DH as a community of practice levels and beyond. At the same, more work is needed to understand how these teams function and the types of supports needed to coordinate the research, people, and tasks to ensure successful outcomes at these levels (Dombrowski, 2013; Lyall et al., 2013). With this knowledge, DH teams will be better able to anticipate benefits and challenges associated with collaborations and develop processes to maximize benefits while minimizing associated challenges.

At present, much of the body of knowledge about academic team functioning and best practice guidelines has been developed through a reflection process at a project’s completion (e.g., see Bracken and Oughton, 2006; Bryan et al., 2002; Kishchuk, 2005; Lawrence, 2006; National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities, 2010). These reviews often focus on the actual research work accomplished with little discussion of associated processes that supported the work, communication patterns, and other factors that supported successful outcomes (or not). As a result, some hard-earned lessons are forgotten or minimized through the passage of time, but might be captured if this type of reflection occurs during a project’s life.

As a large project in terms of team membership, budget, scope, disciplinary perspectives, and project length and research integration, Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) provides a unique perspective to explore the nature of collaboration (INKE, 2012a). INKE’s primary research focus is the exploration of e-books and their potential from a variety of perspectives, including interface design, modeling and prototyping, user studies, and textual studies (INKE, 2012b). Further, this collaboration is examining the ‘understanding, creating, and evaluating research structures that will allow academic and non-academic (including industry partner) members of our research team to work together in ways that meet the needs of the research and development cycles of the entire INKE group’ (R. G. Siemens et al., 2012, 7).1 To that end, INKE has undergone yearly reflections on the nature of collaboration within the project with an objective to better understand the ways to support large-scale research collaborations as they unfold and communicate these lessons to other projects for consideration.

This paper contributes to our understanding of how research teams function by reviewing INKE’s five years of experience in collaboration and with a view to articulate best practice guidelines (L. Siemens and INKE Research Group, 2010; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d; 2012e; 2013).

**Methodology**

Members of the administrative team, researchers, graduate research assistants, and others are asked about their experiences collaborating within INKE on an annual basis in order to understand the nature of collaboration and ways that it may change over a grant’s long-term life. The interview questions focus on understanding the nature of collaboration, and the advantages and challenges associated with it within INKE’s context. These interviews allow the researcher to explore topics more fully and deeply with probing and follow-up questions while participants reflect on their own experiences and emphasise those issues that are important to them (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; McCracken, 1988; Newell and Swan, 2000; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This paper focuses on a summary of the first five years of the grant-funded work.

**Findings**

At the time of writing this paper, final data analysis is being completed, but clear patterns are emerging and, after final analysis, these will form the basis of my presentation.

While the grant application suggested a stable team of active researchers and partners, the reality has been very different. Due to a variety of reasons (L. Siemens and INKE Research Group, 2012a; 2013), change and transition have been constant within INKE, which has led to subresearch group reorganizations and the creation of new ones. Concurrently, new researchers, administrative leads, and partners joined the team. And as is always the case when working with student research assistants and post-doctoral fellows, sub-research areas were continually recruiting and training new ones as others moved on to other opportunities.

Grounding this change has been several constants that have ensured that the research has been able to continue effectively and efficiently despite the transitions. First, the governance documents outlined clear articulation of roles and responsibilities, which became especially important for ensuring that new researchers, partners, and administration understood and enacted the nature of collaboration and accountability within INKE. At the same time, these documents provided guidance for ensuring that processes for change, transition, planning and reporting, and decision making were considered and thoughtful while remaining responsive to changing circumstances (L. Siemens & INKE Research Group, 2012c). The use of basecamp, an online project space, and an updated project website further reinforced these processes by providing an ongoing repository for messages, documents, data, and publications, all important knowledge for current and new researchers and partners. Second, multiple communication channels—such as annual birds-of-a-feather gatherings, attendance at other conferences, both formal and informal face-to-face administrative and sub-research area group meetings, conference calls, and online project spaces—ensured that team members met on a regular basis to exchange information about and participate in research projects with the other sub-research areas, ensuring highly collaborative work.

As INKE nears the end of its seven years of funded research, the team is anticipating both winding down this focused work on e-books and exploring next research steps, building from its successes (INKE, 2014). While the research has been intellectually challenging and not without its administrative issues, INKE team members report positive experiences in terms of the collaboration, associated outcomes, and connections to the DH and traditional humanities communities. As measures of this positive spirit and connections, they are extending their collaboration into associated research areas as well as contemplating another large-scale research project.

**Implications for DH Community of Practice**

This research will make several contributions to the knowledge base about the nature of collaboration within the DH community of practice. First, this research contributes to efforts to make work patterns and relationships more explicit and understand those factors that tend to predispose them to success, and perhaps, more importantly, to avoid those that may lead to problematic interactions. Already, lessons from INKE are informing other projects’ collaborations (Nowviskie, 2011; The Praxis Program at the Scholars’ Lab, n.d.). Second, INKE’s experience demonstrates that these types of team research projects require skills not typically taught in graduate school, including project management and collaboration within a targeted and integrative research environment, which differs from that of a curiosity-based one. This reinforces the call to enlarge graduate training beyond purely disciplinary to these larger collaborative skills to ensure that students are prepared for academic as well as alternative academic posts (Berman, 2011; Carr, 2012; Leon, 2011; Nowviskie, 2010; Powell et al., 2013; L. Siemens, 2013; Spiro, 2010).

**Note**

1. See R. G. Siemens et al. (2009) for the full grant application.

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