RESEARCH ARTICLE

Productive Uneasiness as a Driver of Knowledge Creation Processes in Humanities-Business Collaborations

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, Danish humanities researchers have become increasingly expected to engage in business collaborations that have an impact beyond academia. Although there is great willingness to work together, humanities-business collaborations are often tense affairs. This calls for a deeper understanding of the collaboration and knowledge creation processes. In this article, we develop the concept of productive uneasiness as a sensitizing tool to show how humanities scholars enable specific knowledge engagements. Examining three empirical examples, we discuss how emerging tension, discomfort, and the like come into play in business-humanities collaborations, and how accepting and engaging in this uneasiness can become productive, eventually leading to innovation. The aim of the article is to provide a tool for reflection for humanities and social science researchers wishing to engage in humanities-business collaborations and, more generally, to spark a

discussion on how one of the core elements of the humanities – in-depth analysis of the intangible – can leverage business processes.

Keywords

Humanities, Business, Collaborations, Knowledge creation, Productive uneasiness.

Introduction

A meeting. Somewhere in Denmark. Five people sitting around a table, eagerly looking at each other. Nervous smiles. Two of the participants are humanities researchers. The other three belong to a medium-sized Danish production company. The meeting was initiated by the researchers and met with a strong collaborative interest. The company had had some good experiences with university collaborations before and was very interested in initiating another one. This meeting, however, seems somewhat odd. While there is a common interest and strong willingness to work together, finding common ground is demanding, somewhat troublesome, creating an elusive tension and uneasiness.

Over the last few decades in Denmark, there has been a growing political demand to create visible and accountable impact and conduct research that is closer to businesses and practitioners. The Danish university law states that universities are expected to "exchange knowledge and competences with the surrounding society and encourage employees to participate in the public debate" (Ministry of Higher Education and Science 2019: §2, sec. 3). This is especially challenging for humanities research. While the creation of spin-offs, patents, and licenses is prevalent and well-established in the technical fields, knowledge creation processes in the humanities and social sciences are seldom as transferable. Amongst humanities scholars, there is, nevertheless, a growing awareness of the need for more humanities-business collaborations, recognizing humanities' vast knowledge of human beings as great potential for enriching the work of businesses (Mahnke et al. 2022). Like the rest of the university, humanistic disciplines are increasingly expected to contribute to society's growth and engage more directly in collaborations that go beyond academia (Oddershede 2009). And yet, humanities researchers' pursuit of intangible subjects such as culture, mind, aesthetics, ethics, etc. often struggles in light of the growing demand for visible impact.

The research project HumanImpact based at the University of Copenhagen was born out of the process outlined above. The aim of the HumanImpact project was to build bridges between humanities research and small and medium-sized companies in order to support the companies' innovation processes. During a four-year project period from

2018-2022, 18 research projects for and in collaboration with companies were carried out. The five researchers (and authors of this article) who carried out the 18 research projects have diverse humanistic backgrounds ranging from communication studies to cultural studies and anthropology.

Drawing on our experience from the HumanImpact project, the aim of this article is to explore and examine the specifics of knowledge creation processes in humanities-business collaborations. We aim to shed light on encounters between humanities researchers and business actors who have a common interest in collaborating on an equal footing. Drawing on organizational theory and more general discussions on the nature of humanities research, we seek to contribute towards advancing our understanding of how humanistic in-depth analysis of mostly intangible aspects creates valuable knowledge in business contexts. We argue that humanities scholars enable specific knowledge engagements that contribute to enriching and leveraging business processes. To advance our understanding of this, we develop the concept of productive uneasiness as a sensitizing tool to illustrate what is unique in such collaborative knowledge creation processes. We argue that emerging tension, discomfort, and the like play an important role in business-humanities collaborations, with implications on both the one and the other. Accepting and engaging in this tension and discomfort is of great value, eventually leading to innovation. In a nutshell, we argue that humanities-business encounters can become more fruitful when embracing precisely that which is demanding and troublesome.

With this article, we wish to inspire humanities researchers wanting to work more closely together with business partners and, further, hope to spark a more general discussion about the potential of humanities-business collaborations. We begin the article with a short presentation of theoretical conceptualizations of knowledge. We then shed light on the particularity of humanities knowledge and what this type of knowledge brings to a collaboration with business partners and their quest for knowledge. Subsequently, we develop the concept of productive uneasiness, and we exemplify and discuss the use of the concept through the lens of three empirical examples.

Theoretical Perspectives on Knowledge Creation

Modern businesses operate in complex, uncertain, and constantly changing environments, and an effective way of dealing with this is through the creation of knowledge (Schulze and Hoegl 2006). In the following, we briefly outline and discuss two theoretical approaches to knowledge creation, one grounded in organizational theory and one representing a feminist science perspective influential among humanities and social science researchers. These two approaches each offer their

own way of viewing knowledge as becoming. With the presentation of the two theoretical approaches, we aim to situate our research in the context of viewing knowledge as becoming, thus distancing ourselves from a more traditional view of knowledge as provision, which has been prevailing in business knowledge research (Thorpe et. al. 2005).

Within organizational theory, the widely applied theory of organizational knowledge creation (OKCT) focuses on knowledge creation processes through the lenses of epistemology and knowledge conversion (Nonaka, Krogh, and Voelpel 2006). The theory argues against an instrumental view of knowledge which assumes that information needs to be gathered to solve a given, pre-formulated problem. It further states that knowledge is highly dependent on individual viewpoints and experiences (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka, Krogh, and Voelpel 2006). Knowledge from this understanding is bound to people and their way of (inter-)acting with knowledge rather than something abstract and independent. Knowledge creation processes are described as situation-oriented in the sense that knowledge needs to enable the individual employee to define a situation and act upon it. Another aspect of this theory is the distinction between knowledge as explicit or tacit. While explicit knowledge can be uttered and formulated, tacit knowledge is tied to human senses and intuition. Ikujiro Nonaka (1991) argues that knowledge is simultaneously explicit and tacit and that research should focus more on the interrelationship between these two concepts.

Donna Haraway, a science and technology scholar known for her work within feminist theory, underscores the importance of understanding knowledge creation processes as matters and not only as an explicit distribution of what is known. According to her, one implication of approaching knowledge as provision is the risk of putting it on what she calls "the trial of strength" (Haraway 2016: 42). On trials of strength, she argues, knowledge is pushed, defended, accused, accepted, or rejected, but rarely evolved, shared, or embraced. Haraway does not provide a recipe for how to co-create knowledge, but underscores the concepts of "making-with" (Haraway 2016: 58) and "bringing home" (Haraway 2016: 43) as crucial preconditions. Rather than focusing solely on delivering what we know, she argues, emphasis should also be put on whom we know and how knowledge is brought home by those involved in knowing (Haraway 2016). Similar to Haraway, OKCT theory describes the process of knowledge creation as a process of becoming (Nonaka et al. 2000). The interrelation of different kinds of knowledge is described through the concept of knowledge conversion, a process by which knowledge becomes or expands by means of externalization, internalization, socialization, and combination (Nonaka, Krogh, and Voelpel 2006).

Each in their own way, both of these perspectives consider knowledge as being in a constant process of becoming and being tightly

linked to its surroundings. The argument is made against a more traditional view of knowledge as provision, which has been prevailing (Thorpe et. al 2005). This view of knowledge as something to be used and acquired places researchers in a position of knowledge providers who are expected to deliver analyses, insights, and results. Humanities researchers may then end up in the precarious position of becoming defenders of what is known by the research field rather than becoming participants in the actual knowledge creation processes.

What is Knowing in the Humanities?

STEM[1] disciplines have long created knowledge for direct use in businesses through patents and product development, while knowledge from the humanities – with their rich and nuanced analysis and interpretations of complex questions – deals with much more diffuse and inferential contexts of application (Cassity and Ang 2006). This difference, we argue, plays a significant role in the positioning of researchers in collaborative settings. With a patent comes a defined product or procedure (the patented), which constitutes something possibly very complex, but nevertheless tangible. Representing STEM disciplines, researchers' legitimacy and authority can be established with reference to how products/procedures function, are operated, or potentially transformed. In other words, what makes the STEM researcher a relevant academic partner in the research-business collaboration often relates to knowing *what* something is, *how* it works, and *when* to intervene in order to control its processes.

Although researchers from the humanities also build their expertise on knowing what, how, and when,[2] the reference to which their knowledge is validated is rarely a product or a process. In the following, we explore the particularity of humanities knowledge and the effect it has on the positioning of researchers. For this purpose, we present the thoughts of Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway. In 1966, Foucault published *Les mots et les choses* (The Order of Things) with an aim to conduct what he describes as "an archaeology of knowledge" in order to identify the conditions of what he sees as a prevalent knowledge regime. These conditions, he argues, change over time and influence what and how we know. The book is devoted to the emergence of the humanities and, of particular relevance to our argument, the conditions on which its knowledge is being produced. Since its publication, *The Order of Things* has been a recurrent reference in the humanities and, in particular, in

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[1] STEM is an acronym for the fields of science, technology, engineering, and maths.

[2] For instance, what, how, and when are of crucial matter to historians and archaeologists.

debates on knowledge production among its disciplines (Bille, Engberg-Pedersen, and Gram-Skjoldager 2019; Smith 2005; Lloyd and Thacker 1997).

According to Foucault (1966), the humanities do not study what the world is, but what the world means. To know things within the humanities is to know the meaning in which they are embedded. Emphasizing meaning over appearance situates the humanistic researcher in the position of a reader or an audience. What appears before the researcher is approached as a sign that refers beyond itself. To the humanities, study objects thus become expressions of something more than themselves (Foucault 1966). A poem is more than words, a painting more than colors, and a piece of music more than sounds. Foucault states that what defines and distinguishes humanistic academic research is the "unveiling of the non-conscious" through particular kinds of reading (1966: 364). To be a researcher from the humanities implies looking beyond what meets the eye. In this light, hermeneutics, semiotics and material semiotics, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, historical materialism, structuralism and post-structuralism are but a few of the wide range of analytical approaches used to unveil the tacit knowledge(s), the unconscious, the cultures, the structures, and the power relations which, in humanistic terms, represent the "non-conscious" in which the world is embedded.

To us, this means that when we, as humanities researchers, enter into business collaborations, we are, in Foucault's words, readers of meaning embedded in the specific contexts we encounter. As an academic practice, however, humanistic research is more than just reading. It also involves articulating the outcome of an analysis. According to Foucault, it is how words and things are related in humanities research that sets it apart from other ways of speaking about the world. Humanistic analysis, he states, applies a vocabulary aimed at overflowing the boundaries of language in order to reach a hidden form, a foundation, an analytic finitude beyond appearance (1966: 336-340). Foucault ends his extensive analysis by launching a stark critique of the humanities (1966: 385), asking: what can this supposedly deciphering eye actually see, what qualifies its visions and words over others, and by what powers are these legitimized?

This critique has been repeated by others and forms an ongoing discussion. Referring to Foucault, Gayatri Spivak (2006) questions the legitimacy of speaking on behalf of others, and, in the book *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) accuses the very notion of "others" to be analyzed and spoken of as a construction of power and dominance. Haraway (1988) challenges the gaze of the all-seeing eye and the universality of its knowledge more generally and points instead to the notion of situated knowledge. She insists that the sight of the researcher is always embodied, here echoing the phenomenological perspective that

the human being perceives the world from a position of always already being embedded in the world. There is no view from nowhere (or above) that gains its objectivity through its distance – what Haraway calls "the god trick in science" (1988: 582). Instead, Haraway argues for a partial perspective that actively seeks out the viewpoint of the unknown marginalized position while at the same time deconstructing its own position as a specific vision in a specific embodied reality (1988: 585). Through such an approach, the unmarked dominant positions of the scientific gaze will cease to be unmarked and will become concrete actors in the specific social, technological, and cultural systems of which they form part.

Following Foucault, the particularity of humanities knowledge lies in the ability to read meaning, while this also poses the problem of the humanities taking the position of the deciphering eye. Engaging in Haraway's perspective, the gaze of the all-seeing eye is flawed, as all knowledge is situated. This requires humanities researchers to reflect on the situatedness of knowledge and the role and power of each partial perspective. The particularity of humanities knowledge can here be found in the ability to *reflect* on the situatedness of knowledge and the role of the parties involved.

Transferring the ideas of Foucault and Haraway into our own work with humanities-business collaborations, it is our understanding that what we bring as humanities researchers is investigations into what things mean, represent, and signify. We do not, however, adhere solely to the research position of a distanced analytical gaze – as pure readers. Rather, we choose to approach business collaborations as embodied encounters in which analytical distance conflates into shared presence, and this very approach is the hallmark of humanities research, which has the potential for creating valuable knowledge.

Towards Productive Uneasiness as a Sensitizing Concept

In order to make sense of the knowledge creation processes that happen in the humanities-business collaborations, we propose *productive uneasiness* as a sensitizing concept. Here, sensitizing should be understood in its literal sense as being sensitive to and/or raising awareness of a particular issue. As a theoretical concept, it thus provides "a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances" (Blumer 1954: 7). The concept evolved out of a systematic analysis of our different collaborations, as we compared and examined our experiences and the respective knowledge creation processes across disciplines and business contexts. We concluded that a common aspect of all our collaborations is what we have termed productive uneasiness. This concept helps us to be sensitive towards, and remain aware of, the distinct particularity of humanities-business collaborations. By

uneasiness, we seek to emphasize the subtle yet strong feelings of discomfort that appeared when we, as researchers, experienced the implications of being situated as interdependent subjects in collaborations with business partners. By *productive*, we refer to the point that the uncomfortable feelings tend to be a marker of productive potential and can be leveraged as such. Before we exemplify productive uneasiness empirically, we will substantiate the concept with regard to the post-modern turn in anthropological methodology and delineate it towards theoretical conceptualizations of awkwardness, looking at similar feelings and experiences.

The post-modern turn in anthropological methodology is most notably captured by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986), who argue for the need to acknowledge the researcher as an interdependent subject (rather than an objective observer) influencing and being influenced by the field. The post-modern turn has called upon humanities and social science researchers to adopt more reflexive research practices. However, as Wanda Pillow (2003) notes, reflexivity has mostly been interpreted as the need to rationally reflect on one's position in the field and the theoretical, as well as personal, perspectives influencing one's interpretations. Through this type of reflexive practice, researchers have come to believe that their analyses become more right, valid, and true. Pillow goes on to argue that researchers have moved into a somewhat "paralysed reflexivity" (2003: 186), meaning that they are stuck in a narrow conceptualization of what reflexivity is and how it should be performed. She argues that we need to move towards more uncomfortable reflexive practices, which means positioning reflexivity not as clarity or honesty, but as practices of confusing disruptions that embrace non-simple stories. Our concept of productive uneasiness is meant as a move towards such uncomfortable reflexive practices and an embracement of the confusing disruptions that occur in humanities-business collaborations.

As an element of discomfort, the feeling of awkwardness as being close to uneasiness has received much attention in recent literature, particularly in the context of doing ethnographic fieldwork. Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock (2004) state that uncomfortable fieldwork is often really good fieldwork. In their work, they seek to normalize feelings of inadequacy, social failure, and awkwardness and point to the need to analyze situations and feelings of discomfort, as they can create new insights. Being sensitive and reflective towards feelings of discomfort can, thus, create surprising insights both into the social worlds being studied and into the methodology being used. Similarly, Birgitte R. Sørensen and Matti Weisdorf (2021) focus on awkward fieldwork moments in their study of the Danish military. They identify and analyze awkward moments that appear in their fieldwork with veterans, in public discourse about the military, and in conversations with scholarly colleagues about

their study. They use their focus on awkwardness to demonstrate conflicting normative views of the veteran and propose a pluralizing attitude to the field. Juliette Koning and Can-Seng Ooi (2013) also emphasize the value of analyzing feelings of awkwardness. They find that awkwardness is rarely a focus in organizational ethnography and point out the enriching potential of identifying and analyzing feelings of awkwardness, showing how a focus on awkwardness brings new insights and enhances the quality of ethnographic work.

Our concept of productive uneasiness echoes these arguments. It differs, however, from previous work in the way that it primarily focuses on the feelings of discomfort that arise between the researcher and a collaboration partner and *not* between the researcher and the field. Compared to the latter, the former type of relationship takes a more equal form in that it seeks to conduct research *in collaboration with* a business partner rather than *for* a business partner or solely for research purposes. When conducting research in collaboration with, other power dynamics are at play. One is not more powerful than the other, but the researcher and the business partner have different skills and different power positions which affect their relationship and, thereby, the collaboration process.

Productive uneasiness further differs in the choice of wording and the affiliated meaning. As described above, previous research on the topic mostly focuses on the feeling of awkwardness as a rather strong feeling of worry, discomfort, or anxiety (Clegg 2012; Koning and Ooi 2013; Sørensen and Weisdorf 2021). With uneasiness, however, we want to primarily capture more subtle feelings such as a slight touch of worry or tension in the relationship. Our concept of productive uneasiness is also inspired by a norm-critical analysis strategy whereby one reads the material through the lens of "what comes off as odd" and what "itches" in the text (see, amongst others, Staunæs 2007). We use the norm-critical strategy as a way of unveiling the productive potential in the collaborative context. Instead of looking at the structure, the norm, or the main characteristics, we look at the unwelcome irritation or annoyance; in other words, the lingering feeling of discomfort that tells us something about the cracks in our professional roles, letting us zoom in on the unplanned encounters.

Examining Productive Uneasiness Through Three Empirical Examples

In the following three examples, we explore and discuss what happens to the humanistic research approach when we, as humanities researchers, encounter businesses in their settings and environments. How and why does it "itch" in the social setting of the humanities-business collaboration process? Or, in other words, how and when does the uneasiness present

itself, what does it stem from, and what potential does it create? We see rising tensions as both a challenge to the collaboration as well as its productive potential. It becomes a tool with which to embrace the humanities-business collaborations as embodied encounters inclusive of not just rational reflexivity, but also emotional reflexivity. The three examples have been chosen because they demonstrate three significant ways that knowledge creation is productively entangled with feelings of uneasiness: through asking odd questions, embracing unfamiliar spaces, and vulnerable self-reflection. The examples are anonymized versions of real collaborative situations in the HumanImpact project and represent what we have identified as typical situations in the collaboration process. The examples are written from the personal perspective of an "I", each representing a researcher in the group. Following the description of the empirical examples, we will discuss further possibilities and the challenges of embracing productive uneasiness in university-business collaborations.

Example 1: Knowledge Creation Through Asking Odd Questions

I, an anthropologist, participated in a meeting with three representatives from the company (a project manager, a sales director, and a designer). The meeting was a short follow-up meeting as part of a collaboration in which I was to examine how elderly people, with disabilities or frail bodies, experience challenges in the bathroom. After two weeks of ethnographic fieldwork, doing interviews, and observing bathroom usage, I was eager to share some insights from the sites I had visited and the interviews I had conducted. As an anthropologist, I was particularly interested in interactions, routines, and the social and ethical dimensions of the everyday practices of using the bathroom – or the meaning of these practices, as Foucault would put it. As the fieldwork was taking place in private and intimate situations, I had only a few pictures to show the company, and I therefore chose to read aloud from my field notes in order to give a few examples of bathroom usage. The company representatives listened carefully to my accounts from the field. One of the examples demonstrated the use of a shower trolley at a rehabilitation center. Besides serving as an assistive aid when showering residents, use of the trolley had a rehabilitative purpose. At the visit, I was shown how a shower would normally proceed and how different rehabilitation exercises were integrated into the practice. I noticed how the care worker moved around the room, interacting with both the trolley and the person lying on it. Rehabilitation was naturally fundamental to all practices at the center, but rehabilitation as an ideal has generally become central to most care work (Hansen and Grosen 2019). The case, therefore, served as a good example of how to think rehabilitation as an ideal into the design of assistive aids.

After finishing my presentation, I asked the company representatives if and to what extent they consider how to design products that not only compensate for users' disabilities, but also promote rehabilitative purposes. The question sparked an interesting discussion about the product as not only an object to be used, but also as an active producer of certain uses – and what responsibility the company had as a producer not only of products, but also of practices. However, I was not the only person to ask questions. As I presented the example to the company representatives, the designer posed, with great interest, a number of questions: Where do they put the towels? Where is the drain located? How do the wheel brakes function? All questions I could not answer. I simply had not paid attention to any of those details because my research interest had a very different focus. My inability to answer the designer's questions left an uneasy void in our conversations and I felt exposed as being the expert that was expected to know the field in detail and then could not answer these quite simple questions. I tried to recall the details that the designer was asking for while also trying to direct our conversation towards my own interests and questions. The conversation continued oscillating between these very concrete details and my attempt to talk about rehabilitation in design without ever getting closer to the location of the towels or the function of the wheel brakes.

After leaving the meeting, I wondered: Were our different questions a symptom of a collaboration in which we were too far removed from each other and were speaking two different languages, making it impossible to continue collaborating on a common project? Was my knowledge from the field less useful given that I could not answer the designer's questions? I do not think so. Rather, the meeting and the situation of uneasiness displayed the importance of discussing what we perceive as relevant knowledge and of appreciating different perspectives. From the designer's questions, I gained a glimpse into her way of thinking, investigating, and crafting, which I could take back into my forthcoming fieldwork. While I, as an anthropologist, was focusing on the practices I observed, the designer was already thinking of how to transform knowledge from the field into new and better products. From my questions and descriptions from the field, the company gained both detailed descriptions from everyday use of their products and an opportunity to discuss the values inherent in their products. Moreover, and maybe even more importantly, our different questions initiated new reflections about what we were working towards as collaborators.

The process of asking each other questions indicated a contour of something, maybe still unidentifiable, but something that could materialize into a product in time. How will this "something" look? What functions will it have? Which needs will it satisfy? And how will it affect care work? The shape or function of the product was not clear to any of us. We may feel a little uneasy about not being able to answer these

questions immediately, but our common, not yet materialized product, was being negotiated and slowly identified by all of us as a shared product as we remained in the uneasiness and got to know each other's perspectives, work processes, and ideas about this "something" through the questions we asked each other.

Example 2: Knowledge Creation Through Embracing Unfamiliar Spaces

In the following project, I was collaborating with two partners: a consultancy that specializes in organizational transformation and an interest organization (IO) working for improvements in the quality of life of people with disabilities in Denmark. My role was to contribute to the consultancy's evaluation of the IO's work, in particular how their unique interaction and close connection with their members was relying on, and could be improved through, digital communication. Besides my own meetings with the project managers in the IO, I attended the evaluation workshops arranged and facilitated by the consultancy. The setup was knowledge co-creation through the concept of collaborative evaluation (see, for instance, Petersen and Søndergaard 2021). In what follows, I will zoom in on one of these evaluation workshops to explore how productive uneasiness was present in this meeting.

The consultant led the workshop through different knowledge facilitation processes; for example, a session of group brainstorming in which the project managers and I, along with the workshop participants, wrote our input concerning a specific element in the evaluation on colored paper cards. We categorized the colored cards as a group effort, discussing each card. Going through different variations of this process, the workshop was filled with dialogue, sharing thoughts and inputs, and reaching shared understandings of relatively complex and compressed knowledge about the IO's work. In the workshop, it was as if the consultant was mining out a presumed silent knowledge from each participant, helping that knowledge to take a specific form of colored cards and post-its on a whiteboard. At one point, the consultant said: "Write short statements – we don't want to be too academic. No one wants to read too much text." I, the humanities researcher being the epitome of "academic," felt slightly affronted by the thought of too much text being something unwanted. One could argue that my professional knowledge is, after all, primarily text-based. The consultant's statement made me feel uneasy. I had to lay off my long-text-based approach because, in the context of the evaluation workshop, the valuable and intelligible format of knowledge was keywords, co-created visualizations on a board, dialogue, and discussion. Since I was there to collaborate and contribute my professional expertise, it made me feel uneasy that my "academic" approach and virtues were not considered very useful or valued. So, what kind of post-it statements were useful? And how was my

presence then valuable to the collaboration? How was my uneasiness productive?

A typical challenge in humanities-business collaborations is the question of translating between knowledge spheres; for instance, the theoretical/academic vs. the practical/expert, and how to make research knowledge applicable to businesses – and to become intelligible to each other (Tjørring and Nielsen 2022; Vacher 2022). The co-creation workshop proved to have a surprising practical solution to this problem in this specific collaboration. The dogma of the workshop was that everyone present should participate, which meant that any attempt to be outside the situation looking in as a quiet observer was not possible. Everyone had to chime in on the brainstorms with no time for preparation or working through arguments such as textual references, for example. In that sense, the workshop dogma also implied that everyone present was to be trusted as knowledgeable on the subject matter.

As I was participating on equal terms with the project managers of the IO, our respective knowledge and experiences were, thus, set on equal terms. This is not to say that it suddenly made all of our knowledge and experience available and intelligible to each other. In the current task of evaluating the IO's work and organization, we had to put ideas and statements on the table so that we could take part in a shared process of building intelligible knowledge together. For this, I made a statement on a post-it saying that "authentic presence in digital communication" was an "effective mechanism" for the IO to achieve its goals of including citizens with cognitive disabilities in volunteer organizations as volunteers. I based this statement on my knowledge of the IO's digital presence, of which I had already done a preliminary analysis, and found that they had an extraordinary authenticity and presence with their target group. I knew that this was only partly conscious from their side, as they had not prioritized their digital communication, even though they wanted it to have a stronger role in their recruitment process.

My statement was put next to the IO project managers' statements such as "make adjustments in volunteer tasks to match abilities" and "clear expectations" as effective mechanisms. These statements were based on their practical expert knowledge from working every day on organizing and communicating with their members. As we discussed our statements with each other, they became part of a specific shared understanding of important knowledge in the evaluation process. When I put into words what was unique about their communication and social media presence, they reflected on the concepts of authenticity and presence in relation to their self-perception and work. Furthermore, we discussed with the consultant how to align their communicative strategy to their values and goals as an IO.

Before the workshop, I might unconsciously have fallen into the idea that I should *provide* specific knowledge to the IO. However, in this shared workshop space with set ground rules – which made me uneasy as they constrained the use of my academic tools such as reading and comprehensive writing – we each participated in an accumulation of our separate knowledge. It became something shared and something new in this space. The uneasiness indicated an opportunity to enter a knowledge creation process not based on two parallel partners providing insights from each side of the table, but as a social process of becoming. The fact that I could not provide a lengthy written analysis not only made me uneasy about what to do, but also made me uneasy in not knowing how my knowledge would be transferred or provided – how it would "stick." As we put up post-its on the wall, I experienced how the knowledge we collectively built up in a post-it pattern was transforming the ways in which we conceptualized certain topics, and how we created a terminology that was richer now that it involved our different input. I was further able to integrate a self-reflexive analytical perspective on the communication aspects of their work into the evaluation that would not have been included if I had not been present. The uneasiness turned out to be a premise in a space that was highly productive in terms of collaborative knowledge creation and learning about the collaboration partners.

What if I had not participated in the workshops? I could have gone through with my part of the evaluation and just met with the project managers, interviewing them about their communication practices and analyzing their digital communication output. I might have concluded my evaluation in a textually-rich and analytically-dense report, wanting to really give them a worthy product. This, however, would have been of little value to them, as I learned in the workshops. In this situation, research-business collaboration also means participating in knowledge sharing practices. This means relaying what one knows in forms that are intelligible and valuable to others, and it means embracing unfamiliar spaces where dialogue and co-creation are making way for a becoming of knowledge as shared understanding.

Example 3: Knowledge Creation Through Vulnerable Self-Reflection

In the following project, I was collaborating with a global environmental organization with the purpose of investigating the challenges of cross-cultural collaboration in employee-leader relationships within the organization. The collaboration between the organization and me was facilitated through my monthly meetings with a follow-up group consisting of five employees in the organization. Throughout these meetings, preliminary knowledge emanating from my data collection was presented, debated, and reflected upon. It was through these meetings

that vulnerable self-reflection appeared and accelerated the knowledge creation, which the following two examples illustrate.

At one of my meetings with the follow-up group, I presented the preliminary finding that the main leadership style was heavily based on the ideas of a non-hierarchical relationship between employee and leader and of direct communication being a positive thing. When I pointed out that these leadership values were dominating other types of leadership values in the company, it caused several reactions among the members of the follow-up group. Firstly, the follow-up group objected to the point made and tried to soften the word dominate: "All staff are equal and we don't favor one leadership style over others." Next, it caused the follow-up group to self-reflect on the matter and develop solutions to the problem: "We need to discuss whether we prefer this leadership style and how we balance this with respect for other employees and their leadership styles." The research presented caused the members of the follow-up group to critically observe themselves. They felt exposed, and some of the leaders in the follow-up group took the research finding as a personal attack on their leadership style. Empirically, this could be seen in the way in which members of the follow-up group started defending themselves as well as through changes in their body language (for example, looking troubled and moving restlessly). The research was not just presented; it was also felt and caused an uneasy feeling of vulnerability among the follow-up group members. The vulnerability also accelerated knowledge transfer, as the organization noted this finding more than others. This is in line with Joshua W. Clegg's (2012) point that feelings of awkwardness and vulnerability tend to intensify the social experience and make it difficult to ignore.

The feeling of vulnerability also accelerated further knowledge creation, as the finding was heavily discussed by members of the organization beyond the follow-up group. It brought forth nuances about leader-employee relations that I was able to use to sharpen the research findings. For example, it became clear that the CEO of the organization, who was not part of the follow-up group, had little interest in disseminating a research finding that was critical of his leadership style. This demonstrated the importance of the power dynamics between leaders and between leaders and employees, and it also made me reflect on my role as a researcher and my ability to disrupt those power dynamics. In this sense, knowledge creation became a collaborative process characterized by negotiations and a reciprocal interplay in the form of a serial movement back and forth between the follow-up group and me. The follow-up group had important knowledge and experience of what was going on in the organization, and I came with the position and skill of being able to look at things differently. Neither of these stood alone, but became something together.

Another example shows the opposite situation where the organization caused me to "see myself" followed by a feeling of vulnerability. In the process of conducting research for the company, it was decided that the findings were to be presented in what I called a cultural guide, to be distributed to all employees. The cultural guide consisted of a presentation of my research in a systemized way under various topics. Each topic was followed by a list of open-ended reflection questions in order to encourage the employees to discuss the issues in the organization and develop their own solutions to the problem. The idea was to create a product that was beneficial to all employees and respected the need for local and cultural embeddedness by way of posing open-ended questions.

The follow-up group was generally very pleased with the cultural guide. However, one member of the group, an employee with a leadership position who had worked more than 10 years for the organization, commented: "I'm worried what the Eastern European team will think. I don't think they'll get the point of the cultural guide. It might just make things worse, because we have exposed the problems, and that's not a common way of doing things for them." I realized that, despite the aim of creating a tool that could help employees in the organization improve their cultural collaboration skills across boundaries of difference, for some employees it could have the opposite effect. It made me reflect upon my work in a new way: that the very idea of exposing problems as well as the idea of encouraging discussions through open-ended questions was, in fact, highly embedded in my own understanding of how to develop solutions. I was feeling vulnerable in this situation and felt the comment from the organization manifesting itself as bodily discomfort, which could very well be an example of what Haraway (1988) terms embodied encounter. I started asking myself questions such as: "Should I not have thought about this as an anthropologist?"

On a positive note, the comment from the follow-up group enabled me to critically reflect upon my own results and practices. The comment caused a collapse of knowledge, exposing my vulnerability as a researcher, but it also sparked new ways of thinking and new processes of knowledge production and meaning-making. For example, I started reflecting more upon what part of the research results to share, in what (other) way(s) and with whom. I also recognized new aspects of the importance of power dynamics in the organization and how these power dynamics took different forms. In both examples, the vulnerability caused by self-reflection was powerful in the sense that it immediately attracted the attention of the people involved in the discussions. It seemed to accelerate processes of knowledge creation, which was perhaps due to the emotional nature of feeling vulnerable. Emotions such as feeling vulnerable can be treated with intellectual vigor and can assist rather than impede processes of understanding (Davies 2010). Taking the

feeling of vulnerability, as well as other feelings of uneasiness, seriously is also an example of performing an inclusive reflexivity (Pillow 2003; Koning and Ooi 2013), which in this case helped reveal nuances of power dynamics in the organization. To sum up, the knowledge creation happening in this example was enabled and accelerated through the vulnerable act of "seeing oneself." The process of collaboration between the humanities researcher and the employees in the organization enabled these uneasy moments of self-reflection and sparked new insights.

Embracing Productive Uneasiness: Possibilities and Challenges

In our three examples, we have shown how feelings of uneasiness were entangled with knowledge creation processes in different ways. In all examples, all partners involved demonstrated a strong desire to collaborate. It was nevertheless a meeting of two rather different approaches to the world, for which reason some degree of friction seemed inevitable. Rather than trying to dissolve differences or erase friction, we started to embrace the insecurity and undecidedness, realizing the potential and openness that derives from these. The examples are meant to show three significant ways that uneasiness can become productive for knowledge creation. They also spurred new reflections on what knowledge is, how the business partners experienced the collaboration, and whether confrontation should be actively sought. In the following, we discuss these reflections.

At the start of this article, we outlined different positions on what knowledge is and drew attention to a division between viewing knowledge as provision and knowledge as becoming. It seemed to be a division between a theoretical understanding of knowledge as becoming and a more traditional, common sense understanding of knowledge as provision. In the three examples, we showed that knowledge creation is a process of becoming influenced by both researchers and business partners. It is, however, worth noting that the process of becoming-with also entailed a certain element of coming-with-something; for example, a research skill or experience of the workings of the organization. It can, therefore, be argued that knowledge creation in the three examples had both elements of provision and becoming. Even if we had found no empirical evidence for knowledge as provision in our analysis of the collaboration projects, it was nevertheless an empirical finding that the business partners often expected us to provide them with knowledge and, hence, perceived us as knowledge providers. As humanities researchers, we need to be aware of this distinction lurking in the background and address it up front. This will help to connect the different understandings and use them as fruitful resources.

The different perceptions on knowledge also raise the question of whether university-business collaborations would benefit from explicit

discussions about processes of knowledge creation. On the one hand, such discussions could facilitate closer collaboration ties and understandings of each other's work, which could reveal new insights. On the other, such rather abstract discussions may likely be considered irrelevant and too time-consuming for business partners concerned with the practical value of their engagements. What all three examples also show is that the humanities researchers felt a responsibility for enabling processes of knowledge creation. Whether the business partners felt a responsibility was less clear. Nor was it clear whether they felt that they were playing an active part in knowledge creation even though we, as researchers, experienced this collaborative effect. We argue that knowledge creation processes should be made more visible and discussed as part of the collaboration process. Perhaps feelings of uneasiness may naturally appear in such discussions and, thus, become productive. We propose making businesses aware of the concept of productive uneasiness as a tool rather than solely using the concept as a tool for researchers. This has the potential to strengthen business partners' perception and experience of being an active part in the knowledge creation process.

Another consideration is whether we, as researchers, could gain from being more confrontative in collaboration processes and actively provoke feelings of uneasiness with the purpose of driving knowledge creation. There is probably a balance to be considered as too much confrontation could damage collaboration processes rather than make them productive. In the example of the environmental organization, the confrontation was not planned, but the presentation of preliminary research results happened to be confrontative and subsequently turned out to be productive. Rather than advising one or the other, the point is to draw attention to the possibilities inherent in using the tool of productive uneasiness. It will always be up to the individual researcher to consider the relevance and possibilities in the specific context of which they form part.

Concluding Remarks

Humanities researchers in Denmark are called upon to show the impact of their work beyond academia. One way of doing so is by engaging in humanities-business collaborations. Drawing on the experiences and research material gathered throughout the HumanImpact project, we argue that humanities-business collaborations often take place in a space of tension, uneasiness, and/or discomfort. Initially, this may appear as an obstacle; however, in our view, it is this productive uneasiness that has the potential to become one of the main drivers of knowledge creation in humanities-business collaborations. Being able to read and embrace the human aspect of such collaborations has the potential to improve them. With each encounter also come moments of tension, uneasiness, and

discomfort. This is what makes collaboration difficult, but this is also where humanities researchers have their advantages. They can look to their analytical and reflexive skill set and turn experienced uneasiness into something productive.

Focusing on knowledge as becoming implies shifting focus towards how knowledge is created. The process of becoming is a result in itself as both researchers and business partners come to think in new ways through the collaborative project. This does not mean that we cannot (or should not) pause and say "this is what we know" nor that we should stop recognizing that each part is coming-with-something. Rather it means that any knowledge created is simultaneously knowledge with the potential of becoming something more. The humanities researcher's ability to provide a specific analytical gaze, embedded and situated in the collaboration processes rather than distanced, is what creates novel forms of collaborative knowledge.

Translating the findings of this article into concrete hands-on advice for humanities researchers planning and/or wishing to enter humanities-business collaborations requires one specific point of attention; that is, any collaboration will involve a certain amount of tension. Preparing for this tension and using – rather than avoiding – it can become an entry point to understanding and accelerating knowledge creation processes. In this article, we have shown three ways in which knowledge creation has been connected to feelings of uneasiness. Our hope is that these examples will serve as inspirations to focus attention on productive uneasiness in researchers' collaborations and empirical work. The moments of tension and uneasiness are potentially unique spaces of innovation that humanities researchers have a particular ability to read and use productively.

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