A Conceptual Analysis of Stakeholder Networking in Higher Education Institutions

*Dr Winnie Joyce A, ** Dr Jonas Richard A

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Kristu Jayanti College, Bangalore

[2]Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Kristu Jayanti College, Bangalore

Abstract: **Networking is an indispensable function of any organisation in the present scenario. The need for networking is all the more important if the education institution is associated with the development of benefices who are influenced by multiple stakeholders. This paper is the review of the importance of networking for higher education institutions. The paper also focuses on the levels, principles and challenges of effective networking with multiple stakeholders.**

Keywords: **Network, Stakeholders, Engagement, Higher Education.**

1. INTRODUCTION

A stakeholder dialogue process will ensure that the views, insights and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders – higher education institutions; their representative bodies such as national rectors' conferences; regional and international networks and groupings of higher education institutions; students groups; employers and unions; representatives of academic and other staff; foundations and research centres working in higher education – are properly taken into account. The success of any program in the 21st century rests on three major pillars, namely, the need and relevance of the training, the content and the methodology of the training and marketability and visibility of the program. Of all the above three, academic education institutes focus on the training and its content and methodology but neglect the most important third pillar. This paper is an attempt to highlight the importance of professional networking with the stakeholders in higher education.

Significance of Stakeholder Networking

The concept of a stakeholder networking that can be used in organizations to manage relationships in a complex and dynamic environment. The stakeholders of higher education consist of students, parents, staff members, multiple partners and the localized communities in and around the institution. It is necessary to classify the partners and customers according to different perspectives, including finance, processes and collaboration, external impact and organizational learning. These perspectives provide a safeguard that all the necessary elements are included in the future success and quality assurance of an institution.

The importance of external stakeholders for higher education institutions increases when budgets are cut in public funding. Strategic networks and other partners are needed to successfully apply external funding for research and development. The institution should have wider collaboration with the other institutions to gain knowledge and to adopt new methodologies and design the innovative strategies.

The strengthening of networks among the stakeholders is an essential element of any strategic framework. Hence there is a critical need to understand the concept of networking, its types, challenges and barriers.

The term "network" is very expansive and encompasses a wide variety of sub-categories, including communities of practice, knowledge networks, lateral learning networks, and consortia, just to name a few. The word itself can mean many different things to many different people.

The network is a grouping of organisations and/or their members who engage in patterned interaction with similar objectives and goals, depending upon the nature of interaction and the goals perceived by the organisations/persons.

The guidelines to engage the stakeholders:

1. The faculty must take the lead to provide stakeholders the data and other information they need to be productive partners around student achievement.

2. Partnership activities must be directly aligned with student achievement goals.

3. Efforts must be collaborative and genuine. There are meaningful roles for each party to play and these must be clearly articulated.

4. Information sharing must be transparent. Achievement data must be clear, accurate, and meaningful.

5. All parties must operate from common values and a common vision for student achievement.

6. All efforts must be mission-oriented and data-driven.

Levels of Networking with Stakeholders

Generally there are two levels of stakeholder networking. One is face to face and the other is by staying connected by using technology. Following are just some of the specific ways a network can be initiated and sustained.

Level	Method
Face-to-Face	1. Advisory Councils 2. Project Teams 3. Task Forces 4. Focus Groups
Technological	1. Telephone Calls 2. Video Conferencing 3. Websites 4. Instant Messaging 5. Emails 6. Newsletters

Stakeholder Networking Theory

In response to shifting concentration from dyadic relationships, new methods were developed for analysing the complex array of multiple, interdependent relationships existing within organisations" stakeholder environment (Rowley, 1997; Andriof & Waddock, 2002; Mahon et al., 2004; Neville & Menguc, 2006). A more elaborate approach to stakeholder mapping was proposed by Rowley, 1997), in which multiple ties between the focal organisation and inter-stakeholder ties are considered.

This new development is known as stakeholder networking theory, which is underpinned by the fundamental principles of social network analysis theory.

Overview and Principles of Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis is a derivative of the social science field, which is increasingly used to understand behavioural and social phenomena in various contexts (Rowley, 1997). The theory has a complex history of diverse strands of research (Scott, 1991). However, a clear lineage can be constructed from three main lines: the sociometric analysts, who produced many technical advances by using the methods of graph theory; the Harvard researchers of the 1930"s, who explored patterns of interpersonal relations and the formation of „cliques"; and the Manchester anthropologists, who built on both these strands to investigate the structure of „community" relations in tribal and village societies (Carrington, Scott & Wasserman, 2005; de Nooy, Mrvar, Baragelj, 2005; Scott, 1991). Scott (1991) provides an illustrative summary of this lineage and an in depth analysis of each major development stage.

There are several comprehensive reviews of social network analysis that cover both the underlying principles and assumptions, and the practical aspects of the models and methods (de Nooy et al., 2005; Nohria & Eccles, 1992; Scott, 1991; Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988). It can be surmised from these reviews that the fundamentals of social network

analysis focus on the conceptualisation of social structure as a network of social ties, whether it be the structure of human groups, communities, organisations, markets, society or the world system. The argument is that these ties are important because they transmit behaviour, attitudes, privileged information or goods, and they also provide access to opportunities and enable individuals to obtain resources (de Nooy et al., 2005; Jack 2005; Mahon et al., 2004). During its early days, social network analysis was used by anthropologists who studied kinship relations, friendship, and gift giving among people; social psychologists who focused on affections; political scientists who studied power relations among people, organisations, or nations; and economists who investigated trade and organisation ties among firms (Scott, 1991).

Network centrality refers to an individual actor''s position in the network relative to others, which is commonly used to evaluate an actor''s prominence or power within the network (Scott, 1991). The greater the centrality of an organisation as the focal point in a network, the more the firm will be able to resist stakeholder pressures (Vandekerckhove & Dentchev, 2005).

Thus far, social network analysis has been described without its links to stakeholder theory. Framing the stakeholder concept as a more complex and dynamic environment of multiple stakeholder interactions and influences, and bringing light to the idea of stakeholder networks led to the emergence of stakeholder networking theory.

Key Principles of Stakeholder Networking

Following are some of the basic principles that need to be followed while trying to network with multiple stakeholders

Principle 1: Acknowledge and actively monitor the concerns of all legitimate stakeholders, and should take their interests appropriately into account in decision-making and operations.

Principle 2: Communicate openly with stakeholders about their respective concerns and contributions, and the risks that they assume due to their involvement with the corporation.

Principle 3: Adopt processes and models of behaviour that are sensitive to the concerns and capabilities of each stakeholder

Principle 4: Recognize the interdependence of efforts and rewards among stakeholders, and should attempt to achieve a fair distribution of the benefits.

Principle 5: Appropriately compensate if there are harms and risks that cannot be minimised

Principle 6: Avoid altogether activities that might jeopardize inalienable human rights (e.g., the right to life) or give rise to risks which, if clearly understood, would be patently unacceptable to relevant stakeholders.

Principle 7: Acknowledge the potential conflicts between stakeholders, their legal and moral responsibilities for the interests of stakeholders, and should address such conflicts through open communication, appropriate reporting and incentive systems and, where necessary, third party review.

Benefits of Networking

Some of the benefits of active networking with the stakeholders include:

1. Links knowledge with action: It is commonly understood now that any sustainable initiative requires interdisciplinary approach and the integration of multiple levels of competencies. So networking can be an effective tool to create a path for sustainability of the project and thereby converting intentions to actions.

2. Enhances collective action:

Effective networking enhances the collaborative efforts of the stakeholders for a common cause and thus paves the way for even the future projects on a mutually shared interest.

3. Promotes shared social responsibility: Collective Social Responsibility is ensured through effective networking and creates opportunity for shared value creation. Thus, making every stakeholder enjoys the satisfaction of having contributed to the development of the society.

2. CONCLUSION

The quality of services by development institutions depends upon the strength of the stakeholder networking. Networking becomes fruitful when it is based on mutual trust, open communication and t transparency without any hidden agenda. School leaders must take the initiative in forming strong partnerships. This begins with identifying what we want constituents to know about our work and our results to date and articulating what they can do to achieve and sustain improved results. Schools exist to serve the educational needs of the community. A community's schools are at their best when they are sharply focused on specific, mission-oriented outcomes, such as empowering all students to become successful readers, and when they are consistently successful in delivering on the mission. The community itself is at its best when its stakeholders know how the schools are performing and when they advocate for and collaboratively support improved outcomes.

REFERENCES

[1] Carrington, P., Scott, J., & Wasserman, S. (eds) (2005). Models and methods in social network analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[2] De Nooy, W., Mrvar, A., & Batagelj, V. (2005). Exploratory social network analysis with Pajek. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[3] Dialogue by Design (2008) A Handbook of Public & Stakeholder Engagement http://designer.dialogueby design.net/docs/

[4] Friedman, L. and Miles, S. (2006) Stakeholders Theory and Practice Oxford University Press

[5] J. Kettunen, (2014).The stakeholder map in higher education, International Journal of Learning and Teaching, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 19 – 22

[6] Rowley, T. (1997). Moving beyond dyadic ties: A network theory of stakeholder influences. Academy of Management Review, 22(4), 887-910.

[7] Scott, J. (1991). Social network analysis: A handbook. London: Sage Publications.

[8] Vandekerckhove, W. & Dentchev, N. (2005). A network perspective on stakeholder management: Facilitating entrepreneurs in the discovery of opportunities. Journal of Business Ethics, 60(3), 221-232.