The Stakeholders and Image Building of Academic Institutions

Nopporn Peatrat*, Sasithorn Ranabut, Doungduen Wannakul & Subsiri Seniwong Na Ayudhaya

Faculty of Education, Suan Dusit University, Lampang Center, Lampang, 52100 Thailand

Article info

Abstract

Relevant stakeholders to academic institutions are essential to the institutions' operations and activities, and potentially receive both positive and negative impact from their institutional activities. As a result, expectation of different groups of stakeholders should be monitored and well managed. The key points consist of the following: determining stakeholders, compilations and analysis of expectations, responding to expectations, monitoring and evaluation. Importantly, the administrators of academic institutions should support the relevant stakeholders' participation. Key factors which administrators need to adhere closely are as follows: First, setting a clear vision and mission that reflects the philosophy and policy of the institution through ways of behavioral observations, symbols and communications. Second, institutional identity must be clearly defined and obviously established. Third, integrated marketing communications by means of internal and external communications should be imposed and acted upon. Fourth, positively creating the image and reputation of the academic institution through stakeholders' engagement, and finally, producing future stakeholders by way of mounting and finding prospects, which could be gained from carrying out effective communication channels between the institution and stakeholders, building positive images and perceptions on identity and reputation of the institution.

Introduction

The management of academic institutions is in dynamic environments and conditions of competitive advantages. These conditions affect academic professions and institutions, especially the quality of academic management, organizational structure, human resources and budget management, in line with the concept of decentralization and stakeholders' participation. According to National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) (Ministry of Education, B.E. 2013), Educational Reform emphasized learner-centered development, curriculum and learning contents, learning process management within the formal and non-formal educations, systematic reform of teachers, scholars and relevant academic staff. The main purposes were to enhance the development and quality of academic scholars, to reform academic management, to contribute management resources for educational purpose, and to improve educational quality assurance system. Due to the enforcement of National Educational Act B.E. 2542 and environmental changes, relevant stakeholders to academic institutions play important roles in the standard of educational

* Corresponding Author
  e-mail: np_peatrat@yahoo.com

management, based on learner-centered development and educational quality assurance.

In order to build up the institutional image via the stakeholders' participation, the institution should have better understanding of stakeholders, management of their expectations and process of institutional image.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders refer to individuals, groups, communities or organizations that are interested and able to affect the performance and activities of the organization. The activities and performance of the organization have both positive and negative impacts on stakeholders. Similarly, Freeman & McVea (2001) defines stakeholders as individuals or groups that can create impacts and/or be affected by business operations or activities related to the organization. Stakeholders consist of people within the organization (such as employees, etc.) and outsiders (such as customers, government agencies, competitors, vendors of production factors, industrial groups, etc.). Stakeholders are divided into 3 groups as follows.

1. Key stakeholders have important influences on the success and activities of organization such as customers, suppliers and creditors etc.

2. Primary stakeholders have both positive and negative impact from the activities of the organization such as raw material suppliers, business partners, community and society.

3. Secondary stakeholders are not directly involved in the activities of the organization such as government agencies, mass media, external organizations.

Stakeholders in each group have different expectations from different organizations. Responding to the expectations of administrators' stakeholders is in accordance with the stakeholder theory, developed from Barnard's concept. Barnard (1938) proposed a positive view of administrator in supporting social responsibility. The concept, based on the theory of stakeholders, aims to consider stakeholders, to respond to the expectations of stakeholders, to increase more social responsibility and to focus on the silent stakeholders. Thus, the theory of stakeholders is related to stakeholder management by considering need, interest and effect arising from policies and activities of the organization's operations. The stakeholders are important part of the success or failure of the organization (Freeman, Wicks, & Parmar, 2004).

Management of stakeholder expectations of educational institutions

The importance of stakeholders contributes to the organizations' success. Therefore, the administrators should consider the guidelines for responding to the expectations of the stakeholders of educational institutions. The processes are classified as follows.

1. Determining stakeholders

Stakeholder identification is varied in different organizations. The determination of stakeholder will be considered as:

1) A person who is directly or indirectly affected from the organizations' operation.

2) A person who can create both positive and negative effects on the organization.

3) A person that the organization must have legal responsibility.

The stakeholders in educational institutions are composed of:

1) Learners are the customers of academic institutions. The learners are stakeholders who are directly affected by curriculum, teaching and learning management and administration of academic institutions.

2) Parents of learners are the customers of academic institutions and have direct relationships and significant influence on the learners for selecting the schools. In addition, they provide scholarships to the institutions and monitor the progress of the learners, as a result of the teaching and learning of institutions.

3) Agencies are important stakeholders who influence the institution for policy formulation and the implementation of curriculum. There are the follow-up of the institutions' performance. If the institutions are categorized as public entities, the agencies will be considered as main sources of funding for academic institutions.

4) Teachers and academic staff or employees in educational institutions are important stakeholders and valuable resources for implementing the curriculum to effective and qualified teaching management and directly affect the learners.

5) Owners of funding are from both public and private institutions. It is essential to use funds for implementing various activities of academic institutions. Such funds are from government agencies and external private agencies that support academic institutions. However, when the institutions have not paid for the exchange of assets or resources from external parties or organizations, such transaction will be referred to as

short-term source of funds for institutions.

6) Partners of academic institutions are fundamental stakeholders of the institutions. The partners of academic institutions consist of suppliers of materials, tools for teaching and learning management and administration, beverage suppliers for serving students, partners and academic staff.

7) Competitors of academic institutions are the stakeholders who have mutual relationships. The competition of institutions affects continuous improvement of educational quality. In this regard, under the context of similarities and differences of institutions, academic administrators must carefully consider the determination of competitors to compare the benchmark for educational quality.

8) Society and communities, especially surrounded by the institutions, have been affected by their academic activities. The institutions are perceived as learning resources for the students and eventually influence the development of the curriculum.

9) Other relevant organizations focus on the performance and activities of academic institutions, such as the Office for Educational Standards and Quality Assessment, Internal Audit, Organizations related to educational research and development, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, academic institution, to be accepted and lawful, must have responsibility for implementing the designated guidelines.

Determination of stakeholders of educational institutions may be reviewed periodically according to environmental changes.

2. Compilation and analysis of expectations

According to the determination of stakeholders of academic institutions previously mentioned, the administrators must pay attention and consider the responsibilities of the management in order to meet the expectations of all stakeholders with a balanced method. Therefore, the information of the stakeholders' expectations is important for administrators with the following details.

2.1 Various methods and tools are used for gathering expectations of all groups of stakeholders such as:

2.1.1 Questionnaires
2.1.2 Conferences and small group meetings
2.1.3 Discussions
2.1.4 Brain storming
2.1.5 Shared opinions through social media
2.1.6 Stakeholders' documents and certificates

Time frames for gathering expectations are periodically and continually proceeded.

2.2 Analysis of stakeholder expectations, after the process of gathering the stakeholders' expectations, is implemented in the following order:

2.2.1 Classification of group expectations is the criteria of similarities and differences such as expectations for teaching and learning, environment management, personnel management, budget management and financial courses.

2.2.2 Assessment of expectation impact is a process of evaluation in both positive and negative aspects. The institution might respond or not respond to such expectations. The assessment will evaluate the impacts that have occurred on educational institutions and other stakeholders of institutions.

2.3 Prioritization of impacts from expectations groups are divided into 2 groups as follows:

Group 1 The Educational institutions' expectations are immediately implemented by spending small amounts of budget and without negative impact on other stakeholders. On the contrary, there are positive impact on the institution in accordance with the philosophy and identity of the institution.

Group 2 Expectations require further information such as the budget for long term operation, inconsistency with the policy of institution and negative impact on stakeholders.

In line with prioritization of such expectations, the administrators are able to determine the activities and plans of the educational institutions in short and long terms.

3. Responding to the stakeholders' expectations

In response to the expectations of stakeholders, the administrators must consider prioritizing of plans, projects and activities, including preparing budgets and mobilizing other resources to carry out such expectations. In this regard, the management must create the participation of stakeholders affected by such actions, including risk management plan.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the operation are during the implementation of plans, projects and activities or after the completion. The administrators should determine the results and impacts from the operation. The results and effects are in both monetary and non-monetary forms, as shown in Figure 1.
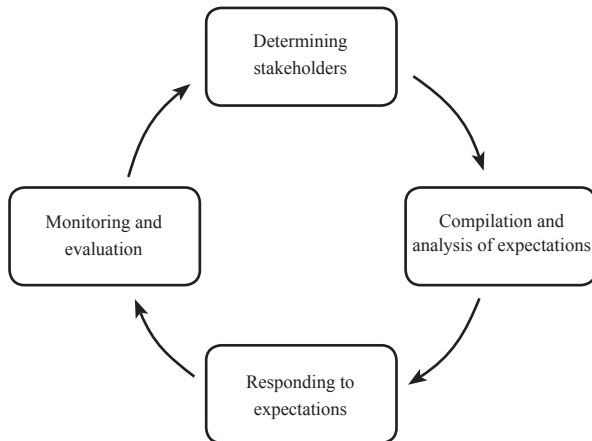
Figure 1 Management of stakeholder expectations

In addition to the management of stakeholders' expectations, as one of the basic stakeholders' management guidelines, the administrators should focus on 'Corporate Image Building' by stakeholders.

Corporate image building by stakeholders

In the business sector, the administrators should pay attention to image, as an integral part of management. Even though the image is abstract, it is a part of the business success. Image, within an individual thought, is a result of direct or indirect experience of an individual. According to Kotler (2000), the image defined as belief, thought, impression of individual on a particular thing. Corporate Image, therefore, is a picture within an individual's mind for the organization. Furthermore, Jefkins (1993) referred the image to organizational image that people have recognized, perceived and experienced. Such images included management, product and service of the organization, communication activities and operations (Marken, 1994). However, the image is not a sort of deception or propaganda without facts.

The process of creating organizational image by stakeholders is shown in Figure 2
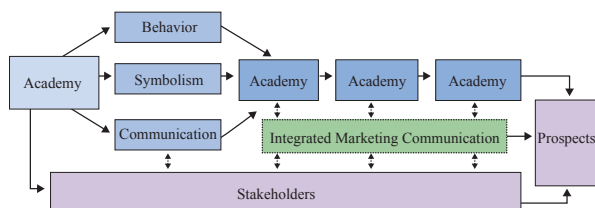

Figure 2 The process of creating organizational image by stakeholders
Source: Developed from Alessandri (2001)

Figure 2 shows the process of creating corporate image by stakeholders. The academic institutions can apply the image creation process through the following steps:

1. Setting a clear vision and mission: The vision and mission of an academic institution reflects the underpinning philosophy and policies of the institution (Abratt, 1989). From the abstract to the concrete, the stakeholders have a perception of images with a tangible form. All administrators and staff should have thorough understanding of the vision, mission, philosophy and policy of the academic institution. Therefore, they will be able to create the clarity for other groups of stakeholders. The institution creates a clear and concrete education through 3 mechanisms: behavior, symbols and (in) direct communication (Bronn, 2002) as follows:

1.1 Behavior is the practice of academic institution by providing better understanding of stakeholders. The purpose is to apply the vision, mission, philosophy and policy of the institution to the implementation level and to become 'Corporate Culture'. In this regard, the administrators of the academic institution should insert, review, mention, describe and adhere as a guideline for the regular and continuous operation, in order to increase other stakeholders' recognition and understanding, which eventually becomes knowledge.

1.2 Symbolism is representative and marketing position of the academic institution. The symbol of the institution is shown to the stakeholders to recognize and understand in a variety of forms such as logos, colors, slogans, typefaces and uniforms. In addition, the symbol also includes environment management, supporting the learning skill, safety and expressed behavior of learners. However, the expression of the symbol brings about the recognition of stakeholders through visual and feeling (affection).

1.3 Communication is a process of sending news, information of academic institutions to stakeholders. The communication of the administrators requires a variety of channels to all groups of stakeholders including documents from academic institutions, signs, announcements in social media, formal and informal meetings (e.g., orientation, meeting or conversation, greeting). Two-way communications allow the executives to answer questions, clarify and receive the messages of stakeholder expectations. This communication should be done consistently.

Information for communication reflects current data and future data (outlook), especially the development data of academic institutions and possible changes. However, such information must clearly show the clarity and concrete of the vision, mission, philosophy and policy. Symbol, media and staff of academic institutions are communication tools.

2. Setting a Clear Institutional Uniqueness and Identity: Each academic institution sets their own institutional uniqueness and identity. The determination of institutional uniqueness and identity have to be consistent with institution's philosophy and vision and it is the duty of the institution's administrator to concretize such uniqueness and identity so that the stakeholders would be able to see, capture, be aware, and experience them through integrated marketing communication. Before imposing any integrated marketing communication activity, the relevant administrators and personnel in the academic institutions must have awareness, understanding and be a part of working in academic institutions.

The objectives of setting a clear institutional uniqueness and identity are:

2.1 To make stakeholders to feel confident, understand, impress and accept in teaching methods and operations of academic institutions;

2.2 To make targeted stakeholders to response to the motivation derived from institutional uniqueness and identity, for example, encourage collaboration in mobilising resources and communicate with other stakeholders to promote operation of academic institutions;

2.3 To create a good image for academic institutions so that stakeholders would have a good attitude and communicate good information to the prospect stakeholders in the future.

Creating clarity of institutional uniqueness and identity for academic education varies amongst each institution as it depends on each institution's uniqueness and identity. Some institutions' uniqueness and identity may be based upon learning results of the learners so in this case the relevant academic institution should develop its teaching methods, curriculum and varying learners' characteristics in such a way that the institutional uniqueness and identity would appear in learners. However, the institutional uniqueness and identity of academic institutions must not be complicated (Simplicity) and can be developed into a variety of creative ideas with uniqueness and relevance (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

3. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC): This is a process of properly using and integrating a variety of marketing communication tools. The concept of planning a marketing communication recognises value creation derived from market strategy planning which covers an assessment of the role of marketing communication and also creates clarity, consistency and maximum impact of communication (Barker, 2012) with the goal aiming to create stakeholders' behaviour through their perceptions which result in knowledge and good affection towards the institution and thereby passing from stakeholders to other persons through word of mouth.

Integrated marketing communication is an integral part of academic institutions' strategy to make stakeholders understand and feel impressed towards teaching methods, curriculum, and an overview operation of the academic institution. Such communication can be categorised into two categories:

1) Inside - Out: Academic institutions send information that needs to be presented to all groups of stakeholders;

2) Outside - In: Academic institutions offer information that is in line with expectations and needs of the stakeholders.

Proctor & Kitchen (2002) suggests that the successful marketing strategies in the 21st Century is due to successful communication strategies as well as creative thinking that integrates communication activities which give attention to the needs of customers and stakeholders on which information they want to know (outside - in). An integrated marketing communication on stakeholders of academic institutions consists of the following activities:

1) Organizing projects/activities which require engagement of stakeholders (activities). The administrator has to encourage engagement from various groups of stakeholders equally by paying attention and balancing between all groups of stakeholders, for example, inviting a stakeholder to be a special guest to provide a lecture for learners, asking a stakeholder to organise activities for learners, organizing sports activities, hosting events on special dates as well as planning, mobilising resources and jointly evaluating the consequences of the projects/activities.

2) Organizing special training and educating activities (special training) - for example, providing information for parents on matters in relation to students or hobbies, organizing special training such as cooking demonstrations for children, providing academic

counselling, observational studying and job training for academic personnel in the academic institution and within its network. . Such special trainings, however, should be consistent with the institutional uniqueness and identity of the academic institution (corporate identity).

3) Organizing performance exhibitions - academic institutions should aim to organise a monthly exhibition each semester in order to demonstrate learner's development by setting particular themes for each exhibition. The content of an exhibition should preferably cover the three following topics:

3.1) The learners' development results in various areas by displaying the learners' work;

3.2) The process adopted in developing the learners which is consistent with the institutional uniqueness and identity;

3.3) The research result/audit conducted by teachers and other personnel within academic institutions with an aim to further develop the learners;

3.4) Special activities organised by the academic institution to develop learners' characteristics.

In organizing an exhibition which aims to demonstrate the performance of the academic institution, it is important for learners, parents, teachers, administrators, academic personnel and other stakeholders to actively participate by presenting their own performance such as exhibiting their works, organizing special events including play sand prize winning games. These activities are considered as part of the exhibition.

4) Launching the new curriculum of the academic institutions (product launching presentation) which is an activity aiming to launch new courses both short-term and long-term courses in the form of academic programmes and other skill development programmes for learners. The launch of the courses must focus on stakeholders' engagement so that they would be best informed about the requisite details and get "the picture of success" which would be derived from enrolling in the courses. Moreover, it should focus on other components relevant to the new curriculum of academic institutions such as organizing a press conference along with an open house, allowing members of the public to visit the academic institution.

5) Organizing an open house (open house) - an activity which allows the public and other stakeholders to visit an academic institution and to observe the development in teaching methods. The open house may

be organised jointly with the launch of the new curriculum or timed to coincide with an exhibition being held by the academic institution.

6) Organizing a road show to disseminate public information about the institutions' performance (road show) - an activity outside an academic institution which requires the use of various materials and equipment including several types of media such as documents, videos, etc. The most significant feature of the road show is the stakeholders which consist of learners, personnel of the academic institution, parents, administrators and other relevant stakeholders which can be considered as a medium and representative in presenting academic institutions' performance to the public and other institutions. The road show includes, for example, an academic exhibition and an academic conference showing learners and teachers works.

7) Organizing a meeting (meeting) - In addition to the semester orientation, a meeting of the academic institution should be organised continuously every semester. This process focuses mostly on the presentation of policy and regulations of the academic institution. The frequency of the meetings depends on the differences between the various groups of stakeholders. The purpose of the meetings is to provide information and the development of the institutional education and to clarify the facts and their justification as well as to listen to comments and feedbacks from the stakeholders. Such meetings may be organised in the form of an annual parents meeting, monthly meetings of the academic institutions' personnel, or a small group of parents meeting for each particular course.

8) Organizing social and community services (service) - the academic institution must pay attention to the surrounding societies and communities. As stakeholders, they may have significant impact on the success of the academic institutions. Therefore, the academic institutions should continuously organise events providing social and community services which are in line with the needs of the surrounding societies and communities, for example, organizing service activities, participating in significant community activities, and providing counsel and community assistance.

9) Creating a network (network) - In academic administration, having a network is crucial. The network of the academic institutions may consist of those in the academic field such as other academic institutions located in the same area, other local or foreign

academic institutions which provide a higher or lower level of education. It would involve an exchange of knowledge and other academic resources within the network. Besides the academic network, the non-academic network is also integral for the success of the academic institution - for example, environmental and social organisations, public charity organisations, government and private agencies. The academic institutions may create a network through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or a request for cooperation or assistance in organizing particular activities.

10) Creating public relations - Academic institution may make public relations in various forms depending on the variety of the targeted stakeholders, for example, advertising boards, printed publications and documents distributed by academic institutions, online social media, radio, and books. In choosing the form of public relations, it is significant to consider the targeted stakeholders as well as the cost and expected likely responses that will be elicited from various forms of public relations and at academic institutions which may conduct via research surveys regarding the use of public relations media so that the promotion of the academic institution would be most effective.

4. Building the image and reputation of the academic institution: Following the marketing communication activities to present the particular uniqueness and academic identity of the institution through stakeholders' engagement. Such engagement can make stakeholders more aware and knowledgeable and obtain a positive impression of the academic institution and thereby encourage them through word of mouth communication to positively convey the uniqueness and identity of academic institution which as a result would build on and enhance the academic image and academic reputation of the institution.

The process derived from the creation of the institutional uniqueness and academic identity of academic institutions which was done by the institution through an analysis of the data on stakeholders which resulted in an academic image is a self-referential process which shows that the institutional uniqueness and identity is connected to academic image and they cannot be clearly separable (Christensen & Cheney, 2000; Christensen & Askegaard, 2001).

5. Identifying prospect stakeholders (prospects): This is a result of stakeholders' communication on the uniqueness, identity, image and reputation of the academic institution through word of mouth on information

regarding the academic institution to prospective stakeholders. The process of building prospective stakeholders is a result derived from the behavioural expression expressed from the academic institution to the stakeholders through the continuous and consistent use of symbols and integrated marketing communication which aims to respond to the expectation and needs of the stakeholders.

The success of the academic image building by stakeholders, however, may vary depending on the academic institution's administrator attention, availability of resources in searching for the expectation gap of the stakeholders and aspects that the academic institution wants to convey in terms of the message to such stakeholders (Reichart, 2003) through developing further integrated marketing communication activities.

Conclusion

At present, stakeholders in academic institutions are interested in and can have an impact on the performance and activities of academic institutions. At the same time, they are also affected, both positively and negatively, from such academic institutions' activities. Therefore, administrators of academic institutions are required to proactively manage stakeholders' expectations and respond accordingly to their needs which may in all likelihood vary between different groups of stakeholders. This includes determining and delineating between various stakeholder groups, compiling and analysing stakeholders' expectations and responding to such expectations as well as monitoring and evaluating the results. It is important for administrators to encourage stakeholders' engagement in order to build the reputation of the academic institution. This can be done through the following activities:

1. Setting a clear vision and mission that reflects the underpinning philosophy and policies of the institution through a variety of mechanisms including but not limited to behavioural observations, symbols and (in) direct communication;

2. Defining and setting forth a clear and concrete institutional uniqueness and identity so that stakeholders can see, capture, be aware, and ultimately experience them;

3. Employing integrated marketing communications which as a process consists of a variety mix of the marketing communication tools. This element of communication should be an integral part of an academic institutions' strategy to create stakeholders'

awareness which can result in building knowledge and encouraging stakeholders' engagement behaviour. Integrated marketing communication can be done through such means as internal communication, where academic institutions sends information that needs to be presented to all pertinent groups of stakeholders, and external communications, where academic institutions offer information that is in line with the expectations and needs of such stakeholders.

      4. Creating an image and reputation for the academic institution through stakeholder engagement which at the same time creates an awareness on the uniqueness and identity of the academic institution among such stakeholders and through analysing such data may lead them to gain a deeper knowledge and obtain a positive impression of the institution which in turn can lead to the enhancing and building of a credible and salient image and reputation for the academic institution.

      5. Identifying future prospective stakeholders arising as a result of effective communication between the current stakeholders on the academic institutions' uniqueness and identity as well as image and reputation of the academic institution to such prospective stakeholders.

References

Abratt, R. (1989). A new approach to the corporate image management process. *Journal of Marketing Management, 5*(1), 63-76.

Alessandri, S. W. (2001). Modeling corporate identity: a concept explication and theoretical explanation. *Corporate Communication: An International Journal, 6*(4), 173-182.

Barker, R. (2012). *Integrated marketing communication.* Cape Town: Juta.

Barnard, C. I. (1938). *The functions of the executive.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University.

Bronn, P. S. (2002). Corporate communication and the corporate brand. *Corporate Communication: A strategic approach to building reputation,* 1-17.

Christensen, L. T., & Askegaard, S. (2001). Corporate identity and corporate image revisited-A semiotic perspective. *European journal of Marketing, 35*(3-4), 292-315.

Christensen, L. T., & Cheney, G. (2000). *Self-absorption and self-seduction in the corporate identity game.* In Expressive Organization. Oxford University Press.

Freeman, R. E., Wicks, A. C., & Parmar, B. (2004). Stakeholder theory and "the corporate objective revisited". *Organization science, 15*(3), 364-369.

Freeman, R. E., & McVea, J. (2001). A stakeholder approach to strategic management. *The Blackwell handbook of strategic management,* 189-207.

Gray, E. R., & Balmer, J. M. (1998). Managing corporate image and corporate reputation. *Long range planning, 31*(5), 695-702.

Jefkins, F. W. (1993). *Planned Press and Public Relation.* (3th ed.). Great Britain: Alden Press.

Kotler, P. (2000). *Marketing Mangement* (10th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Marken, G. A. (1994). Corporate image… to project and protect. *Public Relations Quarterly, 39*(4), 47.

Ministry of Education. (2013). *National Education Act B.E. 2542 and Amendments (Second National Education Act B.E. 2545,* Bangkok: Ministry of Education.

Proctor, T., & Kitchen, P. (2002). Corporate communication. *An International Journal, 7*(3), 144-154.

Reichart, J. (2003). A theoretical exploration of expectation AL gaps in the corporate issue construct. *Corporate Reputation Review, 6*(1), 58-69.