University-Industry collaboration’s impact on internal stakeholders and reputation management: A case study of an emerging public university in Kenya

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Introduction:

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (of United Nations) Goal number four envisions an inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Agenda Four is aligned, locally, to Kenya’s - Vision 2030 Social Pillar which anchors among others education, health and environment sectors to ensure policy implementation that contribute towards prosperity and building of a cohesive, clean and secure environment; transforming Kenya into an industrializing middle income country.

One way university education can contribute to nation building is through matching skills acquired to industrial demands. Therefore, university - industry collaborations are a way to address this challenge through research, consultancy and capacity building; funding, and curricular development.
While collaborations are beneficial to achievement of university goals, there is need to interrogate their impact on internal stakeholders and corporate reputation. What framework is in place to protect the university’s internal stakeholders and reputation? This paper seeks to elicit discussion aimed at making suggestions/strategies to upscale university-industry collaboration to a whole new level.
This paper first examines foundations of university-industry collaborations. Secondly, it examines internal stakeholders’ involvement and their impact on collaborations. Thirdly, it critically interrogates the power relations management in these collaborations and their impact on collaborations on university’s internal stakeholders and reputation. It concludes with a case study of university-industry collaborations discussion.
Foundations of university-industry collaborations in Kenya:

- Kenya’s future, to be an industrialized and competitive nation, depends on among other factors the university education system. Kenya walks a delicate rope of balancing between providing university education based on a humanistic or economic approach. A humanistic approach views education as a public good rather than a private good, a commodity (Daviet, 2016). A public good means that the state provides the education and it is accessible to citizens for ethical and legal reasons (UNESCO, 2015; The University Education Policy, 2012).
Economic approach

- However, the education landscape is changing and the private sector is involved, taking an economic approach. Thus, the economic approach fronts for investing in education for profits through corporate participation.

- At university level, university-industry collaborations encourage education to be an investment that confers economic benefits at an individual level, that is, higher earnings, and collective level, namely, economic growth, higher productivity and competitiveness (Daviet, 2016; Bothwell, 2015).
In line with industrialization and sustainability, the Ministry of Education and Science, enacted *University Education Policy 3.2.4 of 2012* which advocates five university funding sources among them, the private sector.

One thing that stands out in this policy is the provision of naming rights to major sponsors of buildings and facilities. This brings in corporate participation and the question of corporate identity and power relations. Emerging universities require infrastructure development for expansion and accreditation to meet growing population, education and professional demands. Emerging universities are former tertiary institutions that upgraded in 2013 to align with 2010 constitutional transformations and Vision 2030 projections (*University Education Policy, 2012*).
Internal stakeholder involvement in university collaborations:

- University - industry collaborations success is dependent on the organizational system and stakeholder management. The organizational approach views an organization as a relational system operating at the micro-level and macro-level (Katz and Kahn, 1978).

- Corporate strategic alignments promote stakeholder identification and prioritization and issues management. Strategic stakeholders are those critical, crucial or vital for an organization to accomplish its mission (Steyn and Puth, 2000, 65). Collaborations call for missions alignment of both and stakeholder identification for critical research undertaking and independent research results.

- The university missions include educating persons, knowledge creation, and excellence in existing know-how while the corporate missions seek sustainability, competitiveness, innovativeness and market success (Jünger, 2016).
Internal Stakeholders and Research

- Internal stakeholders perceive collaborations through research as critical for sustainability and reputation management. Whether for profit or not-for-profit, research provides for corporations to strive for competitive edge through constant service and product innovation and extensive knowledge accumulation essential for industrial exposure.

- Professional expertise and product/service quality promote corporate profile and performance which are critical to reputation management (Kakuchi, 2015; Gulbrandsen and Smeby, 2005; Scott and Lewis, 2000).
Internship

• University-industry collaborations through internship are critical to graduate employability and exposure (MTP, 24). MTP 2 *Labour and Employment* section outlines internship as a competitive base for a country’s economic growth and employability (Jünger, 2016). At university level, graduates either strengthen or weaken university reputation.

• Reputation is a set of meanings by which an organization is known and by which to create a corporate niche (Argenti et al., 2010; Sevier, 2009).
Case study of emerging university and leading financial institution in Kenya collaboration:

- The institutional background of the emerging university and financial institution aspire for excellence in product/service delivery despite their divergent scope and customer base.
- In the financial institution’s Annual Report for the year ending 2015, the financial institution states that it seeks “to be the preferred financial solution in Africa with global reach”. It has about seven thousand five hundred dedicated and well trained personnel in 260 branches regionally and over one million customers.
University mission/objectives

- On the other hand, the emerging university seeks to be a world class center of excellence in training, research and innovation and has about five hundred employees, five thousand students and two campuses in Kenya.

- The university values include high standards, professionalism, team work, academic freedom and innovation; and the strategic objective is to produce entrepreneurial and market-oriented graduates as well as to curve and develop a unique identity, unique curriculum and boost image.
Concluding remarks:

- Corporations seem to have clearly defined systems that align employee interest with corporate strategy and interest contrary to emerging public universities which have bureaucratic systems without explicit incentives for professors and researchers.
- The interest of the university in general and the staff involved in the collaboration in particular should be aligned to commensurate with their counterparts in the corporate organizations.
- Staff interest should be incorporated in the institutional strategy and policy as part of engaging as equal counterparts in the collaboration agenda. In addition, equity rather than skewed power relations be observed during collaborations to enhance corporate reputation of both organizations.
In addition, there is need to have university-industry collaborations long-term in order to be impactful as opposed to the seemingly programme/project based short term collaborations. Short-term university-industry collaborations may include short courses for students and lecturers, lecturers industry attachment, industry visits, adhoc projects, structured internship programmes, scholarship talent attraction and retention programme (University collaborations Malaysia). Also, these should be anchored on institutional frame work with clearly elaborated principles to avoid shaky foundation of personality based relationships.