

Enhancing Engagement in Business Communication Course Content Development Through Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis at South African HEIs: A Review of Literature

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Abstract: The role of stakeholder engagement in higher education institutions has received attention from academics and industry practitioners. This paper thus aims to gain insights into the assumption of stakeholder mapping and analysis by South African higher education institutions in the course content development activities of business communication modules. Although stakeholders are assumed to form an integral part of decision-making in HEIs, questions have been raised about the efficacy of engagement initiatives that are directed towards them, and whether or not the said initiatives are delivered to the relevant constituents. Within the context of course content development, effective stakeholder engagement is the cornerstone of curating educational experiences that enhance the learning experiences of students. A desk research methodology was undertaken to explore data from existing studies that are centred on stakeholder analysis and mapping, in order to examine findings from studies that have investigated utilising this approach to enhance engagement with stakeholders for module development purposes. The researcher analysed articles, e-books, reports and websites, extracted from electronic databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost and ResearchGate. The findings conveyed the value of involving stakeholders in course content development, they also highlighted the importance of stakeholder mapping and analysis in getting Higher Education Institutions to classify their stakeholders accordingly. This promotes an inclusive approach, ensuring that no one is left behind in conversations, relating to business communication course content development, it also ensures that the requirements of all stakeholders are fulfilled. Collaboration with stakeholders leads to the creation of effective business communication modules that meet contemporary workplace demands.

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement, Higher education institutions, Business communication, Collaboration, Course content development

1. Introduction

The term 'stakeholders' emerged and gained popularity in the 1980s as a response to the increasingly dynamic and complex environments organisations were operating in at the time (Langrafe et al., 2020). Stakeholders include all individuals or groups who are known to have an interest in an organisation, they are central to strategic management functions, all organisations are managed with the intention of generating value for communities, employees, customers and suppliers (Freeman et al., 2020). Within the context of higher education, the term 'stakeholders' refers to a number of people and groups who have an influence or vested interest in institutions of higher learning, these include students, parents, staff members, statutory bodies, professional bodies, suppliers, and governance bodies, to name a few (Marshall and Marshall, 2018). Institutions value and recognise these stakeholders as they are crucial to their success (Makwambeni et al., 2023). Furthermore, stakeholders are critical to the operational and strategic objectives of institutions, hence their support is imperative. Higher education, as a sector not only requires knowledge about the relevant stakeholders, there also needs to be clarity regarding what the expectations of these stakeholders are, and which strategies are suitable for delivering on their respective needs (Shah et al., 2021).

An important element of stakeholder management, also pivotal in identifying relevant stakeholders, is called stakeholder mapping. It is defined as the process of creating a visual representation of individuals or groups who have an interest in an organisation. Stakeholder mapping is one of the fundamental tools that are utilized in various disciplines such as human resource management, integrated marketing communication, higher education, strategic management, finance, and healthcare (Hewett et al., (2021); Slabá et al., (2014); Prisacaru et al., (2021); Newcombe (2003); Gianotti et al., (2021) and Nieder et al., (2020). Stakeholder analysis on the other hand, entails recognising the expectations and needs of the identified stakeholders. Reed et al., (2009); Guise et al., (2024) argue that over and above identifying stakeholders, stakeholder analysis categorises stakeholders according to their attributes, interests and level of power, the process of stakeholder analysis is furthermore conducted to understand the relationships constituents have with higher education institutions and to comprehend their significance and influence.

Stakeholder analysis provides extensive clarity regarding the stakeholders of an institution. This form of analysis entails providing information about the needs, roles, and relationships of stakeholders, acquiring this knowledge is crucial for effective decision-making and organisational success (George et al., 2021). According to (Cottafava

et al., 2020; Sayer et al., 2023) effectively analysing stakeholders, requires organisations to adopt a holistic and participatory approach to stakeholder engagement, this generates a comprehensive understanding of the network of relationships among stakeholders that are involved in a project or institution.

Business communication education is offered by institutions of higher learning as a compulsory module for most undergraduate students to teach them about the basic principles of workplace communication and to expose them to writing business documents such as letters and reports, to name a few (Mdletye and Usadolo, 2024). Engaging stakeholders in the development of course content for business communication modules is critical as it guarantees the alignment of course content to the values, goals, and priorities of higher educational institutions (Beerens et al., 2017). This promotes a common vision for education and endorses consistency in curriculum implementation (Hayward et al., 2017). Effectively engaging stakeholders in the development of business communication modules at South African higher education institutions requires a comprehensive approach that includes communication, listening, and collaboration (Tomaselli et al., 2002). Consequently, consulting several stakeholders on this process may generate diverse knowledge, inspiring course teams to assume teaching, learning, and assessment approaches that were introduced in collaboration with stakeholders. Researchers have found this approach to improve the authenticity of modules and the value students attach to their learning experiences (Jagielski, 2016).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis in South African Higher Education Institutions

According to Syed et al., (2024) the theoretical roots of stakeholder mapping and analysis in higher education institutions dates back to the mid-1990s, at this time research was centred on sustainable development and the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in society. Post-apartheid, the emphasis for stakeholder involvement in South African higher education institutions was highlighted in a 2020 report by the Council on Higher Education (2000) cited in (Bitzer, 2006). The report suggests that to protect the welfare of the country and to develop the economic, political, cultural, and social competence of citizens, countries must depend on higher education institutions to administer effective change (CHE, 2000). Scholars such as Khanyile (2018) and Makwambeni et al., (2023) have also stressed the need for HEIs to involve diverse stakeholders in policy as well as operational processes, suggesting that it is important for South African HEIs to understand how their different actors and stakeholders are engaged.

Some researchers have looked into the challenges South African higher education face with effectively engaging stakeholders. Bidandi et al., (2022) posit that a challenge a majority of South African higher education institutions experience a wide array of financial difficulties, they suggest addressing this is to exceptionally cater to the needs of their stakeholders and to collaborate with constituents that best fit their strategic intentions, presently and in future. While a majority of South African higher education institutions depend on the state and students for sustenance, hence these are considered to be their most important stakeholders. Bidandi et al., (2022) argue that rapport with stakeholders should be maintained to enhance the student experience, provide effective management, and improve decision-making in South African HEIs. Thus, stakeholder engagement should not only be centred on survival and sustenance.

At times there is little or no clarity on which stakeholders can aid institutions to survive, it is thus important for institutions to extend their engagement beyond internal stakeholders. In some instances, South African Higher Education institutions have struggled to identify and analyse their stakeholders (Khanyile, 2018). Hence Borwick (2013) created a map to demonstrate a multitude of the internal and external stakeholders of higher education institutions as well as to depict how these relate and interconnect with each other (shown in **Figure 1**). Stankevičienė et al., (2016) incorporated additional stakeholders to this map, to present a more comprehensive overview. According to the authors, the linkages assist HEIs to manage their operations through distribution channels and to involve all their constituents in internal and external practices, including course management and development.

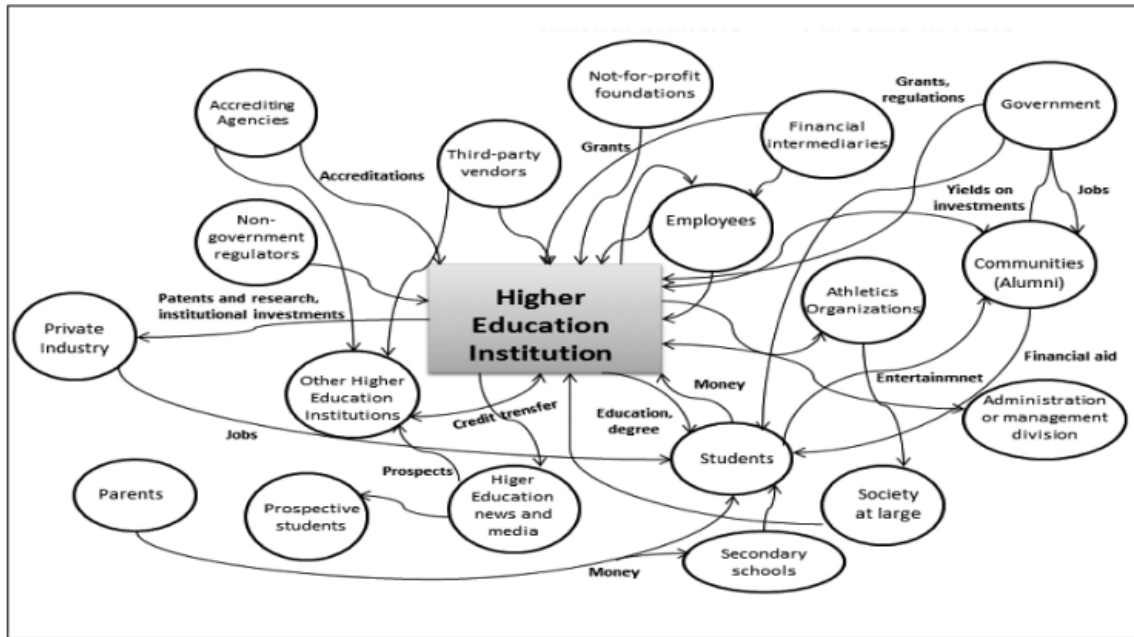


Figure 1: Map and linkages for the internal and external stakeholders of HEIs (Borwick, 2013; Stankeviciene et al., 2016)

2.2 Stakeholders and Business Communication Course Content Development

Processes that enhance course content development for new programs and facilitate curriculum renewal of existing programs are essential in producing educational experiences that are relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of industries (Vreuls et al., 2023). The introduction of new technologies as well as the evolving roles of professionals necessitate updating course content, to keep classes relevant for students, improve retention, and promote student success, in school and after graduating (Caduceus International Publishing, 2021). Du-Babcock (2006) supports this by stating that in the 21st century, teaching business communication has to be characterized by finding appropriate and better ways to communicate, including adapting to a global and multidisciplinary communication environment. Liberalisation and globalisation in business environments have transformed the human capital requirements employers have. In addition to possessing theoretical knowledge, business communication graduates must be critical thinkers, effective communicators, and decision-makers (Sulaiman et al., 2009).

Within the context of students, stakeholder inclusion for Business Communication Course Content Development means that HEIs must have adequate knowledge about their stakeholders and what their learning needs are. Claramita et al., (2020) discussed the need for HEIs to produce student-centred modules as effective learning takes place when students get to participate and interact with the content they engage with. These scholars challenged business communication instructors to do away with administering courses in traditional and outdated means. Course content in business communication education like other modules should be improved to sustain the needs of stakeholders, and fulfil quality and accreditation standards (Williams, 2000).

Moreover, involving stakeholders in course content development for business communication modules is essential as Udegebe et al., (2012) emphasise that the nature of the module is goal orientated, indicating that the policies, rules, and regulations of companies must be communicated to people inside and outside the organisation, it would thus be illogical to develop module content in a manner that isolates stakeholders when the module is based on effective communication with all stakeholders. *Managing for Stakeholders: Survival, Reputation, and Success* written by (Freeman et al., 2007), details the significance of being responsive to implementing the suggestions of stakeholders and indicates that doing so may lead to an improved competitive advantage for institutions.

In its formative period business communication education was concerned with transmitting knowledge about speaking and writing English professionally, rhetoric, as well as writing memos and letters (Nicotera, 2019). 21st-century stakeholders have different needs, the emergence of new technologies such as AI makes it further challenging to outline what the ideal business communication module should encompass. According to Ma et al., (2024) an effective business communication module must prepare students for dynamic work environments

and achieve the four dimensions of work readiness, namely, personal characteristics, social competence, work competitiveness and organisational acumen.



Figure 2: The four dimensions of work readiness (Ma et al, 2024)

Similar to other institutions of higher learning around the world, internationalisation has pushed South African higher education institutions to integrate diverse knowledge into teaching and research (Singh, 2015). This requirement has generated debates about the sustainability of universities in their domestic countries, forcing them to find innovative ways of maintaining relevance through the courses they produce (Msweli, 2013). According to Park (2022), the emerging stakeholder management paradigm of management studies requires new dimensions and approaches to business communication. The responsibility lies with both HEIs and business scholars to capitalize on the power of the stakeholder paradigm and business communication to overcome today's complex sustainability crisis (Bezuidenhout and Kloppers, 2023). In the era of stakeholder management business communication courses have to be purpose-driven, this is achieved through communication between different members of a community, within the context of this paper that community refers to South African HEIs.

In South Africa, consideration has to be given to barriers such as the digital divide and language capabilities, especially English which is predominantly used in teaching business communication modules. Southwood et al., (2020) stress that university students are not always equipped with knowledge about what communication is, from a language and cultural perspective before joining HEIs. This implies that institutions of higher learning need to be sensitive to such challenges when facilitating stakeholder engagement about business communication modules.

3. Conclusion

The findings of this research show that relationships that are maintained by effectively engaging with stakeholders generate additional value for both South African higher education institutions and their stakeholders. It is also worthwhile to highlight that although the implementation of stakeholder mapping and analysis differs across institutions, providing adequate attention to understanding and appropriately catering to the needs of internal and external stakeholders gives HEIs a competitive advantage, which makes them appealing to their constituents. By collaborating with stakeholders Higher Education Institutions generate constructive business communication modules that meet the demands of contemporary students and employers. The literature moreover demonstrated that exchanging information with all stakeholder groups leads to improved decision-making as well as the production of educational experiences that are relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of industries (Vreuls et al., 2023). The relevance of modules like business communication cannot be maintained without consulting key stakeholders, modules of this nature play a large

role in preparing students for the workplace, they thus need to be attuned to the evolving needs of their stakeholders and dynamic work environments. Business communication modules are encouraged to be purpose-driven and contribute to the sustainability of higher education institutions and within the broader context, societies.

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