**Glasgow Caledonia University**

A tri-stakeholder approach to collaborative enterprise projects, sustainable business creation, and responsible leadership skills

**Introduction**

The pursuit of innovative learning methods for business students involving multiple stakeholders with differing agendas represents a serious challenge for management educators. Nevertheless, the concept of a tri-stakeholder enterprise project offers a novel way both to create new knowledge, and to develop future leaders capable of developing sustainable value for business and society at large. The following case story from Glasgow Caledonian University explains how PRME impacts are achieved by connecting multiple stakeholder learning opportunities with three Principles of PRME, notably 3 – Method/curriculum change, 5 – Partnership, and P6 – Dialogue. There are three stakeholders in this case story. The first is the student, the second the entrepreneur, and the third the academic. The potential of these stakeholders to offer innovative pedagogical and andragogical solutions to the development of ethical and sustainable business creation, management and leadership for a future society is underutilised. The following case explains how the tri-stakeholder relationship is harnessed as a learning method; what challenges this learning method encounters; the adaptations required during delivery; and the results each stakeholder experiences.

**Challenges**

Stakeholder dialogue often throws up tensions related to organisational purpose and to the difficult question of whether profit drives success or success drives profit (conscious capitalism). This in turn raises specific challenges, relating to an exploration of students’ own values and how they translate these into decision-making. Faced with such a scenario, students require a settling-in period to reflect, and build a level of confidence that empowers them to ‘take control’ of what is a real “live” project in an academic setting (they are normally more comfortable with directed instruction and linear learning pathways). They are required to make shifts in their perceptions of management decision-making and learning and become independent confident learners. When this occurs, increased self-awareness and levels of communication are the first signal. Thereafter, engagement of students with other stakeholders increases rapidly. Entrepreneurs quickly learn from students how to interact with this audience. Young technology entrepreneurs have a tendency to brief business students with streams of ‘technology speak,’ and a blind pursuit of profit, after which a business student will often say ‘and... what do you mean?’ The academic facilitating the project learns very quickly the challenges of integrating different worlds: the student world, the academic world and the business world, all of which are real worlds, but in different ways.

**Actions taken**

This tri-stakeholder project involves groups of final year undergraduate students investigating business opportunities from the situated perspective of an entrepreneur’s business, whilst simultaneously achieving academic learning outcomes. The projects, sourced from a business incubator called ‘Entrepreneurial Spark’ (see www.entrepreneurial-spark.com), require students to make sense of fragmented market data and identify and develop new evidence-based business opportunities. The entrepreneur provides an initial brief, information about the company, its philosophy, its resources and skill sets – and the entrepreneur invariably (and unsurprisingly) arrives with a purely profit-centred motive. The academic brings theoretical models and interdisciplinary toolkits to the project, with a focus on innovative business models. Critically, the project is led by

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students who bring creativity, resource, innovative thought, and a mindset that goes beyond economic sustainability to include social and environmental sustainability.

The duration of each project is eight weeks, and the process involves application of opportunity recognition models in contextualised situations. Feedback is a key feature of the project, involving iterative dialogue between entrepreneur and student, student and academic, academic and entrepreneur. Web 2.0 tools are utilised for real time collaborative document creation and communication between the stakeholders, forming a partnership that is rich in business and entrepreneurial management discussion.

There are two key actions required to design and develop a successful tri-stakeholder project. The first action is the briefing session, and the second is a process of continuous feedback and dialogue. The briefing sessions are designed to create a learning environment in which the project can be facilitated and all parties can learn. The second action, continuous feedback and dialogue, requires regular communication using multiple methods. This can involve the use of Twitter, coaching individual groups, and meetings with entrepreneurs, all to enhance performance on the project. The entrepreneur leaves feedback on Wikis, and students can contact the entrepreneur directly or leave messages. The academic meets with groups weekly to assess performance and feed forward into learning for the coming week. Features of the learning environment are the use of Wikis, freedom to explore ideas, coaching, social learning practices, and multi-stakeholder interaction.

Benefits/Results

Tri-stakeholder projects provide benefits to all parties. The student experiences a live project, which brings them closer to issues of personal and organisational values, sustainable business development, and the decisions and judgements that they have to make about how to manage and lead when data is partially complete, processes are untested, or when sustainable practice is required. As a result, students graduate with increased self-awareness, confidence and real-world learning capability, based upon creating competencies for the transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice as well as working principles for ethical opportunity recognition and development. The (social) entrepreneur benefits from what is effectively open source innovation thinking, where collaborative capability delivers greater benefits to society. Students are very quick to build social enterprise models, thereby offering the entrepreneur a new way to look at how opportunity might be realised. The academic learns how to move between the world of theory and practice; the benefits of which are numerous and include better curriculum design and better strategies for teaching learning and assessment that bring industry and academia closer together, which in turn improves employability through enhanced communications and confidence amongst the student body. For more information, see www.entrepreneurial-spark.com

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

1. Enhancing stakeholder engagement by improving dialogue between students of business, management educators, and business.
2. Creating a work-related learning environment for the twenty-first century business school, aware of the need to integrate issues of economic and social sustainability in to business model design.
3. Creating fruitful tri-stakeholder partnerships that are grounded in social learning principles and are open and collaborative.