CONCEPTUALIZING ALUMNI SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIOR TOWARDS UNIVERSITY SUCCESS IN CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

In circumstances of diverse source of funding for Higher Educational Institutions, building stronger relationships with alumni and relying on their support is an alternative to state support. In line with prosocial behavior and extra role behavior, alumni support behavior towards their institutions is relatively new outside North America and Europe. The purpose of this paper is to find out possible alumni supportive behaviors towards their institutions and relate it as an addition to government funding. This paper also tries to conceptualize the idea of alumni support as an extra role in educational institutions in context of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Alumni Behavior, Alumni Supportive Behavior, Philanthropic Giving, Extra Role Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Building long-term relationships with organizations’ key stakeholders can be described as an winning strategy in recent years to survive in an ever growing competitive business environment (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003). With declining government support for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) worldwide, it is a must to develop policy to counter the budget constraints, and relying on single source of funding. Many HEIs rely on private voluntary support to accomplish various goals that includes providing learning opportunities to the students, conducting research to improve human condition and enrich their community and to serve its constituents. These constituents are termed as the publics (Kotler & Fox, 1985) with whom HEIs must manage responsive relationships. Kotler and Fox defined public as a “distinct group of people and/or organizations that has an actual and potential interest in and/or effect on an organization” (p. 24).

Alumni of HEIs is one of the main public that provides significant resources and voluntary support for both public and private HEIs. As private fund-rising is an attractive option, this researcher argues that HEIs should consider philanthropy as secondary concern. In context of institutional advancement process, building strategic relationships through adapting more dynamic practices like Alumni Supportive Behavioral Intensions towards the university is far more effective that is embedded within an institution.

An institution can build the relationship through interpersonal interactions among its agents and customers and it can be valuable and long-lasting (Bitner, 1995; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999). Positive effects of customer-institution relationship can be built in Higher Educational Institutions (McAlexander & Koenig, 2001). Beyond just charitable giving, alumni of HEIs should explore multiple ways by which they can be supportive towards their institutions after graduation. HEIs should create a profile of supportive alumni who are likely to be different and generous in the use of both their time and money (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). By this, the nature of alumni gets wide open from donor behavior to non-donor behavior where they can get engaged with their HEIs with participating by monetary contribution to non-monetary activities like voluntary supports. For many of the HEIs outside Europe and North America,
philanthropy is a premature option (Gallo, 2012), for developing country like Bangladesh, engagement with alumni and seeking their support will be a timely decision for HEIs advancement process.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ALUMNI SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIOR

The term ‘alumni’ refers to individuals who have either attended and/or have graduated from an institution of higher education (Agnes, 1999). From this definition, maintaining relationships with HEIs by having a membership in an alumni group do not ensure any responsibility or expectations either in formal or informal manner (McDearmon, 2013). Usually HEIs are both open to alumni support and rely on their personal involvement (Miller, 1993).

From theoretical perspective, contributions towards university by alumni can be described through prosocial behavior. Social psychological model that describes prosocial behavior explains why alumni contribute towards their HEIs (Diamond & Kashyap, 1997). An extension of prosocial behavior is prosocial organizational behavior (POB). POB has been defined as the behavior within an organization that is aimed at improving the welfare of another person (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986).

In addition, POB has also been compared to Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). OCB has been defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directed or explicitly recognized, by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988). Organ’s definition pin points three critical aspects to the OCB construct. First, OCB explains discretionary behaviors those are not part of employee’s job description and performed by personal choice. Second, OCB is beyond enforceable job requirement. Finally, OCB has positive effect on overall organizational progress.

In carrying forward, another construct similar to OCB is Extra Role Behavior (ERB). ERB is defined as “behavior that attempts to benefit the organization and that goes beyond existing role expectations” (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2005). Although ERB is similar to OCB in many aspects, there are two interesting concepts that are not included in OCB. First, whistle blowing that involves reporting of one employee by another so that unethical and/or illegal practices are brought to the attention of authorities (Organ, et al., 2005). Second, principled organizational dissent is when employees protest the organization because of some kind of injustice (Organ, et al., 2005). Both these ideas of ERB is in the sense of further good of the organization. These too are not included in the formal job description. This depicts how supportive behavior of alumni towards their HEIs are in line with the previous theories. This paper tried to find out the possible behavior of alumni and combined them for further study to check the application in HEIs of Bangladesh.

POSSIBLE ALUMNI BEHAVIORS IN UNIVERSITY SUCCESS

The top management in HEIs in countries all over the world are in challenge of increasing pressure to obtain the funding necessary to keep support associated with teaching, research and public service (Johnson & Hirt, 2011; Kwiek, 2014; Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011). Declining state support in terms of percentage of dollar allocated for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) has dominated discussions of higher educational researchers. According to University Grants Commission of Bangladesh report 2014, the total percentage of development budget for educational sector in Bangladesh has decreased from 5.73% in 2001-2002 to 4.19% in 2013-2014. One of the reasons for declining fund from government is rising allocation for other projects like public safety, healthcare and social service. As public universities are the focus of this study, and they mostly rely on government funds, one of the sources of their internal funding is to increase tuition fees that is much in common with private universities. Both form of HEIs face sharp criticism of rising financial burdens of education accumulated by the students and their families (McAlexander, Koenig, & DuFaut, 2014). Management of HEIs worldwide are practicing diversified sources of funding such as philanthropy and donations as an alternative of government support (Gallo, 2012). Consequently, building
relationship with stakeholders such as alumni, and getting their support towards their HEIs is a suitable strategy.

The role of alumnus can either bring great involvement and continuous support towards the institution or no involvement in any type of responsibility at all. This relationship depends on both parties, the individual and institution who bears the title and also their views on role upon which they have been granted upon graduation (McDearmon, 2013). Loyal alumni are major financial support for many universities (McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, 2006).

However, the emphasis on getting donation from alumni has sidetracked most of the scholars and practitioners from understanding the importance of non-monetary supportive roles that can be played by the alumni (Weerts, Cabrera, & Sanford, 2010).

By rethinking our approach towards more alumni relations with HEIs in both monetary and non-monetary outcomes may have significant life-time giving effects and broaden the perspective of relationship management.

CONTRIBUTION

Most of the research has done on the quality of education in HEIs in Bangladesh, others focuses on issues, problems and prospects, followed by commercialization of higher education and service quality in HEIs. Little or no research has been done on alumni and their behavior and it remains an unexplored area for HEIs in Bangladesh. Lack of quality and detailed research in this area not only hinders the policy makers in developing effective strategies for HEIs but also hinders alumni to become an integral part of their Alma matter. This paper might contribute to the HEIs management and their policy makers to rethink about using an unutilized resource and to develop strategy in institutional advancement.

CONCLUSION

Alumni support behavior is still a mere concept in context of HEIs in Bangladesh, though it is a regular practice for many institutions in North America and Europe. A few philanthropy by some quarters, dispersed contributions and alumni donation through trust funds is highly cherished in Bangladesh. If a structured framework can be applied on alumni to make reciprocal and long-term relationships, it would be a milestone for the administrators and alumni office of HEIs of Bangladesh.

REFERENCES


